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DEVELOPING A FEMALE MENTORING PROGRAM IN AN AFRICAN AMERICAN CHURCH

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BY

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ABSTRACT

This project was designed to implement a female mentoring program at Mount Calvary African Methodist Episcopal Church, Towson, Maryland, teaching mentoring skills through twelve sessions of bible study and dialogue.

We utilized the Bible and books authored by African American women, written with a female hermeneutic. The lessons were designed to encourage women to fully examine the lives of biblical women and dialogue about similar contemporary situations.

Results of the model were evaluated by the women's summaries and demonstrated ability to mentor within the group during crisis situations. The women demonstrated higher levels of self-esteem, self-confidence and leadership abilities.

Dedication

To the women in my family who were "born in the days when hope unborn had died," Annamire West, Rosetta R. Harris, Brooksie L. Farrar; to my sister H. Delores Farrar who rejoices with me in the miracles of God; to the women who participated in this "Sisters Sharing" group.

The Focus

The preponderance of women in the seven mainline Black denominations in this country is recognized by most. It is common knowledge that women are the main supporters of Black churches both financially and programmatically, while males traditionally hold leadership positions in the Black church.

Because the Black church has not always considered the Black woman as equal with the Black man in the church, the unique needs of the Black woman, spiritual, cultural, social and physical, have not been seriously addressed by male leadership.

God created women to be "help meet" to man. Woman was created to work hand in hand with man in the home, church, community, nation and the world, for the edification of mankind. Women, as well as men, must be equipped to fulfill their God-given role. This equipping should come from the institution she so faithfully serves, the church.

This model in ministry project will create a female mentoring program designed to fill the programmatic gap

present in the local church. The aim of the christian mentoring program is to help the woman discover their gifts, talents and abilities and to utilize them to implement programs necessary for their own spiritual, social, mental and physical developments as they perceive their needs, rather than depend solely on male leadership in the church to take the initiative to provide adequate women's ministries.

The aim will be to provide a forum for women to come together for the specific purpose of studying the Bible with an emphasis on the female hermeneutic. The women will learn mentoring techniques and utilize them to strengthen and encourage other women. She will become "help meet" in the home, church, community, nation and the world.

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CHAPTER ONE

MEAGER BEGINNINGS

I am a Black woman who has accepted the divine call of God to preach His word. This life changing event occurred in 1981 when my son was 13 years old. I have served as a pastor in the African Methodist Episcopal Church for nine and one half years and my son has been one of my strongest supporters.

To God be the glory for the great things He has done in my life.

I am the youngest of three children born to the late Baxter Roach Farrar and Brooksie Lee Harris Farrar. The cost of hospitalization was too expensive in Raleigh, North Carolina during the late 1940's, therefore, Mrs. Mitchell, the local mid-wife, became the at home "pediatric surgeon" and delivered me as she had my brother, Baxter, before me. My oldest sister, Delores, was born in the local hospital only because of my mother's close encounter with death.

My family was poor, uneducated and unskilled. My parents separated by the time of my second birthday. I was raised in public housing by three women: my mother,

grandmother andgreat-grandmother. No one in the home had

completed a high school education, yet these women were the primary positive influences in my life. While they lacked educational knowledge, they were over compensated in their knowledge of Christ and christian ethics. Our christian foundation was solid and we were taught to love and serve God.

A Brand New World

As a young girl, I grew up in the heart of segregation -- "colored" and "white" water fountains; "colored women" and "white ladies" restrooms; carry out only lunches or sodas at Walgreen Department Store; separate schools for colored and white children -- Raleigh was totally segregated.

In the summer of my sixteenth year, I had the wonderful experience of visiting family in New York. Prior to travelling to New York on a Greyhound Bus, I had never journeyed beyond Pittsboro, North Carolina which is located less than 100 miles from Raleigh. This was an exciting and challenging time for me; exciting because I was introduced to a whole new way of living. For the first time in my life, I lived in a home where a man was the head of the household. I was now a part of a family that was self-sufficient - no more welfare! I was a wide eyed tourist for an entire summer. Little did I know that this was the beginning of a whole new life for me. I met and befriended other young people who, surprisingly, were not preoccupied

with the issue of racial differences. I had my first pizza as well as Chinese and Italian food for the very first time. We attended ethnic festivals in Manhattan and, to my great surprise, there were races other than "colored" and "white" in the world.

The challenge came at the end of the summer when it was time for me to go back to Raleigh. My life had changed so radically in three short months that I felt I could not go back to my family and the segregated South joyfully. We had a family conference and my uncle and aunt both agreed that I was welcome to finish my high school education in New York while living with them.

My mother was furious. She demanded that I return home immediately. She even travelled to New York to escort me back home. However, I refused to go. I loved my family and I missed them, but this new world I was being exposed to was intoxicating. Hence, I could not turn back now! For I believed that to have returned to Raleigh would have been moving backward rather than forward in my new life journey. My mind was made up; there was no turning back.

In September of 1960 I enrolled in Eastern District High School and graduated three years later. My return trips to Raleigh were very brief. I visited during Christmas breaks and summer vacations. I resumed residency in Raleigh, North Carolina upon my marriage to Bruce Lightner, a native of Raleigh and the son of a prominent

mortician who was later elected as Raleigh's first Black Mayor. To this union, our son Lawrence was born. After three years of marriage, which ended in divorce, I again relocated away from my hometown.

As I reflect upon my life's journey to date, I believe that it was the years in New York, the different types of family life, the multicultural high school experience and having worked at Chemical Bank New York Trust Company that influenced the widening of my horizons. There was a new world out there; places to go, sights to see, people to meet, and so much to learn. From this world would emerge a transformed Ann -- a woman who would surprise everyone in her hometown and in the transformation process, even Ann would be surprised.

The move from my hometown in Raleigh, North Carolina to Boston, Massachusetts was the turning point for many changes in my life. For it was there, in Boston, that my life was turned completely around, and the real journey began. I went to higher heights educationally and deeper depths spiritually. Despite the fact that my primary influences were not prepared to encourage or equip me to achieve academically, God had prepared people and put them in my path to encourage and help me on this journey toward becoming His servant.

In 1972, I applied and was accepted at Boston University's School of Public Communication. I was one of

27 recipients of the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Scholarship Award and, am proud to state, that I am only one of three persons who successfully completed this program. Prior to enrolling at Boston University, I was employed as a secretary for two Harvard University Law professors -- Professor Diane Lund and Professor Derick A. Bell, Jr. Professor Bell was, and is, in the forefront of the Civil Rights Movement. He received national attention in 1992 as he resigned his position as Harvard Law School's only tenured Black law professor, challenging the nation's oldest school to tenure a woman. Both professors convinced me that I was "too intelligent" to continue a career as a secretary and "pushed" me into the academic world. Professor Bell, in his publication, Race, Racism and American Law, makes reference to my achievements. More specifically, Professor Bell highlights my story as a Black divorced woman, raising a child, going back to college and completing a post graduate degree. This reference is included in his nationwide lectures encouraging women to become achievers. These mentors and many others, i.e., Dr. Geneva Smitherman of Wayne State University, Dr. Samuel Allen of Boston University, the late Bishop Harrison J. and Mrs. Edith Holland Bryant, Bishop (then Reverend) John R. Bryant and his wife Cecelia Williams Bryant (now Reverend), my pastor, Reverend Floyd Flake, my assistant pastor, Reverend Frank Madison Reid, III, my son's godfather, and my dear friends,

Reverend Susan Johnson and Dr. Patricia Wright, all of whom the Lord placed in my path during my "formative" years of christian and educational growth. These are they who encouraged me and helped me on this road to becoming who God intends for me to be.

"...Any Your Sons and Your Daughters Shall Prophesy..."

Although I was raised in the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church and attended Sunday School regularly until my adult years, my new life in Christ really began in 1973 at Saint Paul African Methodist Episcopal Church in Cambridge, Massachusetts. It was there that I met the Lord in a more personal way. Prior to that experience, I never knew the joy of salvation even though I professed christianity.

Hush, Hush, Somebody's Calling My Name

The Lord began preparing me for ministry in the early 70's. I began to study the word more and more. I became a Sunday School teacher and attended bible study and prayer meeting weekly. It was not unusual for me to be involved in some form of church activity four or five times a week. Additionally, I attended three worship services on Sundays. I started attending spiritual retreats and workshops. Before I realized it, my life was totally centered around the church.

My call to preach was inspired through dreams and visions. I actually saw myself preaching before large audiences of people. I could hear my own voice coming through the radio as other preachers were proclaiming God's word. One morning I woke up singing aloud, "Tell them even if they don't believe you, tell them, even if they won't receive you, tell them for me. Tell them that I love them and I've come to let them know."

I never wanted to be a preacher. As a matter of fact, most of my life I never even knew any women preachers. I remember as a child listening to the radio and hearing a woman preacher named "Sister Gary" in Raleigh, North Carolina. However, I never personally met her. In fact, I never consciously questioned why all preachers and pastors I knew were male. This practice, much like segregation in Raleigh, was an accepted norm that I had no need to question nor challenge at that time.

At Saint Paul African Methodist Episcopal Church, however, I learned that God did, in fact, call women into the ministry just as He called men. Here I witnessed many women preaching the gospel such as Reverend Mary Watson Stewart, a pastor in the African Methodist Episcopal Church out of Chicago and Reverend Willie Barrow, also of Chicago. Even more, I witnessed women going to the Altar and confessing to Reverend Bryant that the Lord had called them to preach his gospel. I began to study about biblical

prophetesses, i.e., Miriam (Exodus 15:20); Deborah (Judges 4:4); Huldah (II Kings 22:14); Noadiah (Nehemiah 6:4); Anna (Luke 2:36); and the Daughters of Philip (Acts 21:9). The veil had been lifted. The truth was before me although some men may have discriminated against women saying, "God did not call women to preach." The Word of God is clear. God is not a respecter of persons; God uses whom He chooses and He never makes a mistake.

It seems strange to me now that I was an adult before I ever heard anyone say anything about women preachers, either positive or negative.

I knew about the Virgin Birth, about the Crucifixion and the Resurrection. I understood the meaning of Communion and Baptism. I believed there was a Heaven for the righteous and a hell for the unrighteous. I believed that Jesus was coming back to receive His church. I even knew that Jesus' twelve disciples were males, but I have no recollection of a theology on women preachers ever being taught or preached about in my presence.

Perhaps it never entered my mind because I was not introduced to the feminist movement until the 1970's. I realize now that I was somewhat of a conformist, accepting things for what they were; never challenging, never probing, never "rocking the boat." I never asked about segregated facilities in North Carolina; that's just the way things were! It was really only after entering college that I

began to expand my horizons and exercise my abilities to question and to reason and to probe into the status quo, spiritually and socially.

Although church, home and community had provided me with a fundamental understanding of who God was. At Saint Paul, I realized that there was much knowledge I still lacked and I was hungry to learn. I always believed that God was real. I prayed every night even when I was not involved in a church. I believed that God answered prayer, could and did heal sick people and God would take care of me and my family. I believed that the sabbath day belonged to the Lord. I did unto others as I would have them do unto me. I knew the Decalogue and was mindful of the laws of God in my daily living. I didn't always keep them but I asked forgiveness and tried to be obedient to His word.

I Put Away Childish Things

The proper foundations were always there in my life, but I suppose that just as I see happening in the lives of those I pastor, it does not all come together at the same time for all of us. "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge...", (Hosea 4:6). I have taken many young girls under my wings for this very reason, they have no idea about what's going on around them in the church or at home. I certainly did not as an adolescent, or a young woman; and

many of them have even less support or mentoring than I had. This journey has taught me that every sister needs a sister.

It was at Saint Paul African Methodist Episcopal Church in Cambridge, Massachusetts, under the ministry of Reverend John R. Bryant, that I began to study the word of God and become aware of theological issues such as Women in the Church and in Ministry, Being Black and Christian, the gifts of the Holy Spirit in Operation Today, and the Role of the Church in the Community.

I became aware at that phase of my spiritual development, that not only had I little or no knowledge of women in ministry (not just the ordained and pastoral ministry, but various other ministries as well), but also that prior to Saint Paul, I had never been involved in a church that had women serving on the ministerial staff or that had specific ministries for women. These programs were developed by Cecelia Williams Bryant through the Missionary Society at Saint Paul. This exceptionally talented woman developed workshops and seminars and other special gatherings such as women's prayer breakfasts and luncheons all designed to enhance the spiritual and social growth of the women in the church and community. These events escalated and developed into an international conference for Black women in Baltimore in 1978 called "Behold The Woman," where hundreds of women gathered for a weekend of workshops, exhibits, fellowship and worship.

Why Was I Compelled?

It was then that I recognized the void in both my personal life and the church where women ministries or programs of substance were concerned. An old adage that says, "you don't miss what you never had" rings true. Prior to my exposure to these invaluable sessions, I had never missed not having the benefit of ministries geared toward the specific needs of women.

How differently my life might have developed if there had been women in the church during my adolescent and young adult lifetime; women who would share with me about womanhood, relationships, marriage, child rearing, education and most of all my potential as a Black woman in Christ Jesus. I believe that my life could have been radically different. I would probably have grown up less insecure and uncertain about what I wanted in life and probably would have had more courage to pursue life's greater opportunities. While the women in my immediate family had my best interest at heart both spiritually and socially, they lacked the ability to prepare me for education and career challenges. We can only share that which we have learned or experienced. Surely there were other persons in the church who, if a mentoring program had been initiated could have filled the gaps my family was not equipped to handle.

This project will show that women are often natural

mentors. I believe, however, that women need leadership and encouragement even in the area of mentoring. They must come to understand that they can make a significant difference in the lives of other women and in society in general.

I have come to understand both from my personal and spiritual growth and development and from working with women in the church setting that women in general know very little about the bible and its reference to the role of women in the salvation plan of the world. Too many women do not yet know if they were created to be a "curse" or a "blessing." This lack of knowledge left me hungry and thirsty for I knew not what. After exploring the word of God however, and seeing His actions in the lives of women, I began to understand my place in the church and the world more clearly. Dr. Renita Weems apparently experienced the same dilemma. She writes:

> Dutifully, we have sat through sermons, lectures and bible study lessons nodding when appropriate, copiously taking notes when expected and when called upon, obediently recapitulating what we have been told. All the while our souls have remained starved for a new revelation on the women in salvation history. Surely God did not mean for us to be a footnote to redemption.[1]

Ministry Birthed in My Personal Life

I have been on this spiritual journey for twenty

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[1]. Renita Weems, Just A Sister Away (San Diego, CA: LuraMedia, 1988), 8.

years and in full time ministry for twelve years. God has shown me that ministry must continue outside the walls of the church rather than only during the Sunday morning services. Although it can become very taxing - those who would mentor must be available for phone calls and sessions during the week.

God uses me in the pastoral ministry to bring young confused women and girls under my wings and into my home in order that they might draw strength from one who was not so long ago afraid, confused, and hurting herself. My home often becomes a sanctuary for a young woman living with a life threatening disease called cystic fibrosis, a young woman who has grown to trust me with her deepest fears and pains. Two years ago, I encouraged and paid for a young man in my parish to take voice lessons and improve and pursue the gift God had given him. That young man, in turn, taught a six year old at our church to play the drums for our worship services. They are both a great asset to our music ministry.

Mentoring or hands on ministry is as important to me as preaching a dynamic, life-changing sermon, or presiding over a church conference. This is simply a personal demonstration of how mentoring takes place in our lives when we take the time to see one another's needs and decide to reach out in whatever way we can.

CHAPTER TWO

INTRODUCTION TO MODEL

This model in ministry project demonstrates a women's ministry that will help fill the programmatic gap for women in the local church. Its aim is to train women to develop and implement programs necessary for their own spiritual, social, mental and physical development as they perceive their needs, rather than depending solely on male leaders in the church to take the initiative to provide adequate women's ministries.

This is not to say that males cannot effectively mentor females in the church. My own father in the ministry, Bishop John Richard Bryant, is an excellent example of one who is able to support, teach and encourage women in ministry as well as lay women in the church. Thirteen of the fourteen women pastoring in the Baltimore Conference of the Second Episcopal District of the African Methodist Episcopal Church came out of Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Baltimore, where Bishop Bryant served as Pastor for thirteen years, and considered Bishop Bryant their father in the ministry.

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In addition to these Baltimore pastors, there are many around the country now serving both as ordained ministers and gifted laypersons, who were also mentored by Dr. Bryant,

and are making an impact on the lives of people in their churches.

This project aims to provide ministries that will both nurture christian women and help them identify and use their gifts and talents to develop programs and to mentor other women. Initially, I purposed to design an African Rites of Passage Program for adolescent females in the Black church. However, I later came to the conclusion that I should follow the Titus 2 model (Titus 2:3-4) and first train the women who will in turn be equipped to reach back and mentor the young girls and other women in our churches.

I reached this conclusion after having organized and implemented several programs for our young girls at Mount Calvary. I realized that although the women of the church were willing and eager to assist in these ministries, I was the primary source of leadership. I orchestrated and everyone obediently followed. However, after the events took place, the young girls totally relied on me to mentor and support them through their various dilemmas.

I realized that even though I was the pastor, I was not the only person capable of mentoring other girls and women in the church. However, the majority of the women obviously did not feel equipped to do all they witnessed their pastor doing with regard to these younger women in the church. It became obvious to me, that the women were as hungry for

mentoring as were the young girls. Women were eagerly volunteering to help at these programs out of their need to be a part of the group and to partake in the sessions planned for the young women.

There were also some internal congregational circumstances that prevented the women from bonding and sharing with each other which will be discussed in the context section. However, after observing the needs of the young girls and the women more closely, I realized that the Titus 2 model was needed in this situation. The older women must teach the young women, but the older women need guidance and assistance in order to fulfill their biblical role in the church and community.

Sisters Sharing is about equipping the women to release the power and the gifts that they already possess to the end of mentoring other females.

This model utilized a study group which used both the Bible and various other books in the area of women's studies that discuss the lives of women in the Bible as well as the lives of women today. These resources introduce a new biblical hermeneutic in that they present biblical women in a positive light while showing from a modern stand point how their lives often mirror and inform the lives of today's woman. Our main textbook is Just A Sister Away, by Dr. Renita Weems.

This project was designed to breathe life into the

scriptures that model women mentoring women and that describe various women's relationships and lifestyles in biblical times such as Titus 2:3-5, the Book of Ruth, the stories of Jephthah's daughter, Martha and Mary and Sarah and Hagar. These and other biblical models will be utilized to show the connection that women have always had without regard to age, culture or religion. The project will also describe other women's support groups that enhance the lives of women in the local Black church.

C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya in their work, The Black Church in the African-American Experience, writes

> all of the seven mainline Black denominations are characterized by a predominantly female membership and a largely male leadership, despite the fact that the major programs of the Black church in politics, economics, or music depend heavily upon women for their promotion and success.[2]

The African Methodist Episcopal Church, whose dominating population is also women, is ripe as a testing ground for women's ministries. It is interesting to note that the African Methodist Episcopal Church is now producing more women in ministry than men in many of her nineteen Episcopal Districts. For example in the District where I serve, the Second Episcopal District, Baltimore Conference, there are more than 100 women ministers serving in various

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[2]. C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya, The Black Church in the African-American Experience (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1990), 275.

local churches. Being accepted in ministry has been a struggle for women from the beginning of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. This change of status came about during the 1950's and the 1960's after centuries of protest and struggle by African Methodist Episcopal women such as Mrs. Jarena Lee, who preached during Bishop Richard Allen's time in the 1800's. After Richard Allen, Founder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1787, heard of her call, his response was, "the Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church knows nothing at all about women who are called."[3]

Mrs. Jarena Lee was never ordained and never held a position of leadership in the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Jarena Lee's response to Allen and the African Methodist Episcopal Church was,

> Oh how careful ought we be, lest through our by-laws of church government and discipline we bring into disrepute even the Word of life. For as unseemly as it may appear nowadays for a woman to preach, it should be remembered that nothing is impossible with God. And why should it be thought impossible, heterodox, or improper for a woman to preach, see the Savior died for the woman as well as the man.[4]

Today, women are entering ministry prepared both educationally and spiritually to lead God's people toward liberation. Mrs. Jarena Lee's testimony is evidence of the

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[3]. Religious Experiences and Journal of Mrs. Jarena Lee, "A Preach'in Woman", AMEC Sunday School Union/Legacy Publishing, Nashville, Tennessee, p. 13.

[4]. Ibid.

ministers in this conference, who, because of lack of available positions, are not able to hold the office of pastor. Perhaps, at a later time someone will research other options for ministries these women might pursue. The point here is that God has women in the church who are prepared to teach and preach and to mentor other women. If male pastors were open to the idea, these women could come into local churches and start women's ministries or teach existing women how to develop ministries that will edify the Body of Christ. I am not suggesting that these women are only capable of mentoring other women. I am saying, rather, that these women have training in various fields and could assist both men and women in unlimited ways.

> If the man may preach, because the Saviour died for him, why not the woman? seeing He died for her also. Is he not a whole Saviour, instead of a half one? as those who hold it wrong for a woman to preach, would seem to make it appear.
>
> Then that little man in black there, he says women can't have as much rights as men, because Christ wasn't a woman! Where did your Christ come from? Where did your Christ come from? From God and a woman! Man had nothing to do with Him.[6]

While this project is not specifically about women in the ordained ministry, it is about women doing ministry, the ministry of mentoring other women. In light of the fact that many women yet feel that there is no place for women in

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[6]. Excerpt from Sojourner Truth's, "Ain't I A Woman" Speech at the 1851 Woman's Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio.

ministry, women must be willing to change their attitudes about a woman's place in the church. This is absolutely necessary because the majority of the women's groups will be led by women, some of whom could be ordained ministers and pastors. There is no question that all too many women have been taught to believe verbatim,

> Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law (I Corinthians 14:34).

Too many men and women believe that women ought be seen in the church and not heard. Of the fourteen African Methodist Espicopal Women pastoring in the Baltimore Annual Conference all but one is seminary trained. Many of these women are serving in the less desirable "far and remote places". In spite of the women's preparedness and dedication word has come from other churches that the people, bear in mind that some 70% of the people are females, do not want a woman pastor.

Mrs. Reba Bass Gilbert, a pastor's wife in Detroit was recently quoted in an article on "Women in the Clergy" in the Detroit News regarding women's acceptance of other women who are in the ministry. "They haven't found any place in the Bible where it says God called a woman to preach."[7] It is sad to report that this graveyard mentality yet exists in all too many of our churches. Women remain in bondage.

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[7]. The Detroit News. August 9, 1992, 6A.

Bondage that has been placed on them by the loose interpretation and misinterpretation of scripture from the Word of God which intends to liberate all of God's people, "you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free" (St. John 8:32). C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya record an incident that supports this contention.

> In the sanctuary of a black Baptist church in Chicago in 1971 at a meeting of the National Committee of Black Churchmen, the following incident took place. Two black women approached the pulpit at different times during the meeting: one was a theology student, so that she could place a recording device; and the other was a Presbyterian church executive, who wished to address the committee. The pastor approached each woman and asked her to remove herself from the pulpit area, explaining that the women church officers had passed a ruling that no woman could stand behind the pulpit for any reason. They wanted to ensure that no woman would be elevated over another in the church, and they insisted that the image of the clergy should remain exclusively male. This incident is one illustration of the fact that traditionally in the Black Church, the pulpit has been viewed as "men's space" and the pew as "women's place".[8]

Men and women generally follow their leadership. Therefore, male clergy persons must begin to take a stand for women preachers if congregations are expected to receive women in the pulpit. All too often male clergy waiver in their position on women in ministry. Reverend Gerald Adams, in the Detroit News article responds, "The bible doesn't

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[8]. Lincoln and Mamiya, 274.

talk about women preachers, it talks about men and we hold to that tradition. I don't question God's calling. I believe God can call whomever He chooses. But some of the brothers and sisters don't feel that way."[9] However, I believe that once women are introduced to a new hermeneutic which shines a positive light on women in the Bible and what their role and potential can be in today's church and society, women will begin to feel better about themselves and thereby become more accepting of other women in whatever role they choose to fulfill. Both of the churches where I have been appointed to serve had never had a female pastor. Many members had never heard a woman preach. But, after serving them, both churches have requested that their next pastor be a woman.

Why The Model Was Developed

This model in ministry was developed as a result of my dissatisfaction with the obvious neglect of God's women in the local church. By neglect I mean that women's needs are not being adequately addressed or met by most congregations' current programming. Our survey has shown that local churches across denominational lines are not providing ministries designed to meet the needs of the majority of their congregations, the female (see appendix -). This model was developed to provide an avenue for women to come together for the specific purpose of studying the Bible with

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[9]. Ibid.

an emphasis on the female hermeneutic; sharing dialogue around the issues raised about women in the Bible in modern times; gathering literature by Black women authors that speak to who we are as Black women and Black christian women; and learning by training in counseling skills, how to mentor other females with whom we are in contact. This model will encourage the women in the local church to access the needs of women in general in the congregation and develop programs that will meet those needs.

This model is needed because women's gifts and talents are not being fully utilized in leadership positions in the church or to develop programs necessary to empower women to be both the help meet God created her to be and mentors. How can we expect young women in the church to aspire to leadership positions when they have no models in the church? Young women will most likely assume, as I did for so many years, that women do not belong in positions of authority, especially the pulpit, and remain "dutiful" pew members.

Most will agree with Drs. Lincoln and Mamiya that "all of the seven mainline black denominations are characterized by a predominantly female membership and a largely male leadership..."[10] if not most, churches do not have ministries geared toward the spiritual, social and physical development of its women, nor are women found occupying seats of power and authority in the church.

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[10] Lincoln and Mamiya, 275.

for her to know her way around the church kitchen, usher on the door and sing on the choir. Perhaps it was because it was not thought to be her place to learn the word of God in more detail. Perhaps church leaders thought, like Jewish males of old, that women should not attend the rabbinical schools (seminaries) or sit with the men while the law (bible) was being taught.

I do not necessarily think that women have been deliberately deprived of sound teachings in order to keep them ignorant of the liberating word of God. Even if this were the case however, women cannot totally blame male leadership. Women are capable of taking responsibility for their own lives and pursuing what they want and need. If women don't allow themselves to become "object" rather than "subject," (as bell hooks terms our taking charge of our lives and situations in her work, Talking Back), they will have more control over policies that directly affect her life.

Women Must "Come to Voice"

I contend that women have been left out of the inner workings of the church partly because we have been silent too long about matters that directly concern us. We are cautioned by feminist author, Patricia Hill Collins, in Black Feminist Thought, to come to know ourselves and to develop a strong sense of who we are. Collins says that "self definition is important in resisting oppression.

Just as the creation would not have been complete without woman, the church cannot be complete with women. God's intention for woman, is stated in Genesis 2:18; "And the Lord God said, it is not good that man should be alone. I will make him an help meet for him." The Bible does not suggest that when God created woman she was to be considered less important than the man He created.

However, because they have traditionally been misused and abused, women need special nurturing in order to fulfill their roles as "help meet" in the home, church, community nation and the world.

The church can and must be the catalyst for this nurturing process so that women will fully realize God's plan and activity in their total development.

Women need a foundation, either spiritual or otherwise, to be good mentors. A woman can only share what she has learned or experienced. The old adage is true in the case of women being spiritual mentors to other women. "You can't lead where you don't go and you can't teach what you don't know." The failure of the church has been that she has not provided adequate teachings for the women of God to provide them with tools to become effective spiritual mentors. Have women been deliberately overlooked in the programming of the church, or was it simply an oversight on the part of the pastor and church leaders? Perhaps no one thought the women needed training in the word of God; that it was sufficient

Without this inner knowledge of self, we can never effectively battle the demons of race, sex and class oppression."[11]

In this work, Ms. Collins centers her readers around the theme that "all African-American women encounter the common theme of having our work and family experiences shaped by the interlocking nature of race, gender and class oppression."[12]

Women must begin to define the specifics of their needs as members of the body of Christ. A strong Black feminist voice is needed because as Collins states,

> all African American women share the common experience of being Black women in a society that denigrates women of African descent...Black women's vulnerability to assaults in the workplace, on the street, and at home has stimulated Black women's independence and self-reliance. In spite of differences created by historical era, age, social class, sexual orientation, or ethnicity, the legacy of struggle against racism and sexism is a common thread bonding African American Women.[13]

Women must work to assure that ministries are in place that serve to edify this unique part of the congregation. They must learn what the bible teaches about women and not

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[11] Patricia Hill Collins, Black Feminist Thought (New York, N.Y.: Routledge, 1990), 22.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid.

allow others to define who they are and what their role is in the body of Christ.

All too often, Black women have been defined by various others, men and women, both Black and White. In the church, just as in the larger society, it is my contention that the Black woman must speak up and speak out for her needs and rights in the church. Too long she has allowed others to be her voice. Author bell hooks asserts that we must "come to voice". She cautions the Black feminist to be careful and aware of what she is speaking.

> In celebrating our coming to voice, third world women, African American women must work against speaking as "others," speaking to difference as it is constructed in the white-supremacist imagination. It is therefore crucial that we search our hearts and our words to see if our true aim is liberation, to make sure they do not suppress, trap, or confine...[and] to know who listens, we must be in dialogue. We must be speaking with and not just speaking to. In hearing responses, we come to understand whether our words act to resist, to transform, to move.[14]

Another prominent theme of hooks' is that the Black woman must consciously move from being "object" to becoming "subject." She writes, "the most important of our work -- the work of liberation -- demands of us that we make a new language, that we create the oppositional discourse, the liberatory voice..this speech, this liberatory voice, emerges only when the oppressed experience self recovery.

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[14] bell hooks, Talking Back (Boston: South End Press, 1989), 16.

Paolo Freire asserts in Pedagogy of the Oppressed, "we cannot enter the struggle as objects in order to later become subjects. The act of becoming subject is yet another way to speak the process of self-recovery."[15]

Woman to Woman

Women mentor out of their own knowledge and experience. Therefore, there are different areas and different levels of mentoring taking place among women.

A woman who is versed in the Bible will be able both to teach and provide encouragement from the word of God, directing other women to scriptures that relate to their problems or circumstances. However, a woman may not know the Bible very well and yet be able to give sound christian advice based on her faith and experiences in the faith. Other women, who may not be in relationship with the Lord, can still mentor women in whatever area they are familiar be it educationally, culturally or socially.

Women share out of common experiences; experiences which ofttimes males cannot relate to simply because they have not had the experience. Common ground binds women together. For example, a woman who is pregnant with her first child will consult another woman for advice and dialogue rather than her husband or male friend. A woman who has undergone a hysterectomy, mastectomy, miscarriage,

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[15]. Ibid.

abortion, or some other experience that is limited to the female sex, is likely to seek out other women who have had the same experience for comfort and advice as opposed to a male who often is at a loss for words and adequate support during these trying times in a woman's life. This is not to say that men cannot offer comfort or support. They can and often do. However, I have found that another woman, is able to relate on a more personal level than even the most caring man. She can truthfully say, "I know how you feel," or "I understand," and speak existentially.

A young woman at Mount Calvary underwent a mastectomy and was having a hard time dealing with living with one breast as a single woman. After counseling with her on a spiritual level about the blessing of life itself, I referred her to another woman in the church who has also had a mastectomy performed. This woman had worked through the trauma and was able to provide counselling and encouragement to the younger woman. The younger woman came away feeling much better and realized that life goes on and that there was someone she could share with when she felt depressed. Someone who would understand from experience.

I have talked with many women who have changed from male to female gynecologists, saying that a female is more understanding, gentle and willing to share more details about procedures than are males. I personally switched to a female gynecologist over 12 years ago. I, too, find a woman

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much easier to talk with about female problems than a male gynecologist.

Another incident in our church demonstrates how women mentor women based on their own experiences. A teenage girl was being made to feel badly by some other teenagers because she was 18 and had not lost her virginity. She came to me with her concerns and fears about feeling pressured into having sexual relations before she was ready. I introduced her to another young lady (whom I had mentored since she was 15 years old) who was also a virgin and had shared similar experiences with me about being teased and pressured by both males and females. Their coming together provided support and friendship for both of these young ladies. They were being mentored, probably without even consciously knowing it.

I submit that this is the typical kind of mentoring that goes on between women on a day to day basis. The intent of this project is to encourage churches to provide opportunities for women to study the word of God on a systematic basis in order that they might be able to share with other women (with whom they naturally come in contact) what God's word says about our particular situations. In addition to her natural ability to support and encourage women, she will be able to use God's word as a foundation for her mentoring.

This project examined scripture lessons that speak to

the woman's life experiences such as the bond developed between Ruth and Naomi (Esther's/Hadassah) female rights of passage in preparation to become queen and to save the Jewish nation; Sarah and Hagar's tumultuous relationship; Martha and Mary's differing personalities and interests. These and many other biblical stories relating to the lives of women helped us to dialogue about how we as christian women, can handle certain situations in our personal lives.

Sisters Sharing

There are natural circumstances that bring women together which can result in bonding and mentoring. This was true in biblical times and it is true today.

Female Waterdrawers:

1) I Samuel 9:11, ...as they drew near the city, they met young maidens drawing water...

2) Exodus 2: Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters: and they came to draw water, and filled the troughs to water their father's flock.

3) St. John 4:7, there cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus saith unto her, give me to drink.

Musical Women:

1) I Samuel 18:6-7, and it came to pass as they came, when David was returned from the slaughter of Philistine, that women came out of all cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tabrets, with joy, and with

instruments of musick. And the women answered one to another as they played, and said, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands.

2) Exodus 15:20-21, And Miriam the Prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances. And Miriam answered them, sing ye to the Lord, for He hath

triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.

Harams - The House of Women:

Esther 2:8-9, So it came to pass, when the King's commandment and his decree was heard, and when many maidens were gathered together unto Shushan the place, to the custody of Hagai, that Esther was brought also unto the King's house, to the custody of Hegai, keeper of the women. And the maiden pleased him; and he speedily gave her things for purification, with such things as belonged to her, and seven maidens, which were meet to be given her, out
of the King's house: and he preferred her and her maids unto the best place of the house of women.

Wailing Women:

1) Judges 11:37-38: And she said unto her father, let this thing be done for me: let me alone two months, that I may go up and dow upon the mountains, that I may bewail my virginity, I and my fellows. And he said, go. And he sent her away for two months, and she went with her companions, and bewailed her virginity upon the mountains. And it came to pass at the end of two

months, that she returned unto her father, who did with her according to his vow which he had vowed: and she knew no man. And it was a custom in Israel, that the daughters of Israel went yearly to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in a year.

Midwives:

1) Exodus 1:15-16, And the king of Egypt spake to the Hebrew midwives, which the name of one was Shiphra, and the name of the other Puah: and He said, when ye do the office of a midwife to the Hebrew women, and see them upon the stools; if it be a son, then ye shall kill him; but if it be a daughter, then she shall live.

Whether the women were drawing water, or singing and dancing, in the house of women waiting to hear if they would be called in to the king's chambers, delivering babies, or sharing the grief of another woman because of the thoughtless deeds of men, these are prime opportunities for women to bond and mentor one another.

Herbert Lockyer, author of All The Women of the Bible, comments on the I Samuel 9:11 text by calling the time the women spent drawing water as a "recognized female occupation of those times - and one that afforded occasion for family gossip." [16] I find it quite interesting that a male author would think this a time simply for "gossip." From a female point of view the hermeneutic is quite different. Perhaps

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[16] Herbert Lockyer, All The Women In The Bible (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1967), 190.

males feel that women are so shallow that their time together is never constructive. A female interpreter might see these as times of both fellowship and mentoring. I contend that these "young maidens" engaged in more than "family gossip." Certainly gossip was not on the mind or heart of midwives, Shiphra and Puah, while the future of Israel was in their hands. And Jephthah's daughter and the wailing women certainly did not use those two months together to engage in "family gossip."

The tradition of women bonding in work situations has continued down through the years. Women are grouped together because of work situations and because of their place in society. In more modern times, our great grandmothers gathered to make quilts, can fruits and vegetables, sew the family clothing, work in the tobacco and cotton fields, plant family gardens, and to worship together.

South African women are left alone to care for the family for months and years while husbands are away working in other townships. I contend that whether it be in large groups or one on one, at work or at play, women tend to be natural mentors to other women.

Can True Fellowship Happen?

Some would say that a women's mentoring program will not work because women find it difficult to get along. These persons say that women are jealous, envious, and ofttimes quarrelsome. I agree that some women have problems getting along with other women. There were contentious women cited in the Bible (Proverbs 19:13; 21:9; and 15). Paul also writes in Philippians 4:2: "I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord." Notice that Paul did not stop with stating the problem. He offered a solution for these women who had apparently allowed some disagreement to come between them. "And I entreat thee also, true yoke fellow, help these women which labored with me in the gospel" (Philippians 4:3). Paul realized, and so do I, that when women are of one mind in the Lord, they can work through difficult situations without loosing respect for one another. We must remember before casting a shadow on women's mentoring projects, that men also have disagreements and yet manage to work together. Paul himself is a prime example. Paul refused to allow John Mark to travel with him because of a prior disagreement. John Mark had not completed a prior missionary journey with Paul. As a result, Barnabus split from Paul and took John Mark with him. Males have quarrels too. This certainly does not say that neither men or women cannot work together, especially when they know the Lord Jesus Christ as Lord of their lives. Relationships can be difficult whether between

men or women. Not all arguments and splits are reconcilable even when persons have the Lord in their lives. We know that Paul and Mark reconciled, but Paul and Barnabus did not. Nor is there any record of Euodias and Syntyche reconciling.

I contend, however, that trust can be built. Through christian nurturing and fellowship we can learn how to handle our disagreements in love. Prayer groups, worship services, dialogue, and women's bible study groups can serve as an opportune time for women to get to know each other at a deeper level and thereby come to love and support one another more readily.

A Look At The Model

> Teach the older women...then they can train the younger women. Titus 2:4

This model of ministry was developed and implemented in a church with a membership of approximately 300 persons of which 70% are female. The core group consisted of 21 women ranging from age 25 to 70. Other women were invited to share in worship services and workshops related to the project. We chose to keep the initial group small for purposes of intimacy, confidence building and the ability to teach and train which requires more personal interaction. Women from other congregations were invited to join the core group and we were thus comprised of African Methodist Episcopal, Baptist, Christian Community and Pentecostal.

We met once a month on Saturday mornings from 8:00

a.m., until approximately 11:00 a.m. The meetings were held at my home with the exception of two which were hosted by group members and the two church services. The group was named "Sisters Sharing" -- "Sisters" because of our common relationship with Jesus Christ and because of our common heritage as African American women who are "Unshamedly Black and Unapologetically Christian"[17] "Sharing" because that is actually what mentoring is.

The basic format of the meetings was as follows:

A. Refreshments and Fellowship

B. Form circle, holding hands, for approximately one-half hour of prayer and praise. Each woman vocalized her specific prayer needs and also "placed in the circle" the needs of women both present and outside the group.

C. The lesson was read aloud and dialogue took place from both the planned and impromptu questions arising from the scheduled lesson.

D. Closing instructions, assignments, prayer and further refreshments and fellowshipping.

The goal of the group was to organize a group of churched women in order to assess the spiritual and social needs of women in the church community. This knowledge would then allow me to further design programs that nurture and develop strong women who are committed to Christ and to each other. The women would be helped to identify and use their gifts and talents, both God given and acquired, to mentor other women.

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[17] Theme from Trinity United Church of Christ, Chicago, Illinois, Dr. Jeremiah A. Wright, Pastor

mentor other women.

As a result of these sessions, every "Sister" would come to know that she has a christian 'Sister' who will support, teach and encourage her as she develops as a woman, a sister and a mentor. Once the project was completed, the women in the pilot group would not only mentor other women, but would continue to study in a larger group of "Sisters Sharing."

To implement this model I utilized monthly bible classes, training sessions on counseling techniques, prayer partners, fasting and praying days and various worship services designed specifically for women. Evaluation came through the women's writings on reflections of the lessons, autobiographies entitled "Where Am I Coming From and Where Am I Going?" and a questionnaire. The primary goal was that women would become built up and equipped to become "help meet" in their homes, churches, communities and the world.

And Ain't I A Woman?

The aim of christian mentoring for African American women is to help the women discover the woman within themselves. She must learn to become comfortable with her womanhood as well as her ethnicity, and she must become comfortable with her christianity. We must be careful not to destroy her true self. The African American woman must become her true self from a biblical basis and not a

duplicate of the mentor or any other woman, White or Black. Our goal was to enable the women to be who God wants them to be, not who the mentor was, or who the mentor wanted her to be.

In order for each woman to get in touch with her true feelings about herself, the women were encouraged to write about their personal lives using the question the angel asked Hagar in the wilderness, "Where are you coming from, and where are you going? And He said Hagar, Sarai's maid, whence comest thou? and whether wilt thou go?..."

These autobiographies gave explicit examples of the pain, fears, rejections, needs and desires of the Black women who sit in the pew week after week and often hear very little that lifts and liberates them. They must be freed to become God's women. (See Appendix A)

CHAPTER THREE

THEOLOGICAL ROOTS

I don't remember a time in my life that I did not believe in God's existence. From my earliest childhood experiences, I most vividly recall Sunday mornings. On this very special day of the week, my great grandmother, Mamma West, would rise earlier than the rest of the family to start the fire in the wood stove and begin preparing breakfast. The family had our "full bath" the Saturday night before and when we arose on Sunday, we hurriedly washed, dressed and prepared for Sunday School, morning worship and possibly afternoon service at Rush Memorial African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (now Rush Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church), in Raleigh, North Carolina. We very rarely missed church on Sunday when I was a child. I sang on the children's choir and always had a part in the Easter and Christmas plays that were held annually.

Most of the children at Rush Memorial African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church learned about Jesus' Birth, Death and Resurrection, and learned to recite the Lord's Prayer, and the Apostle's Creed in our Sunday School

classes.

My great grandmother taught me the principles of christian stewardship at an early age. We were poor and I very seldom had money of my own. Therefore, on Sunday when I was given my offerings for Sunday School and morning worship, I wanted to keep some of it for myself. However, Mamma West told me that if I gave it to God's house, He would provide all that I needed. I remember that one Sunday after depositing all of my change in the offering plate, someone gave me money to spend after church. That was proof enough for me that God would give to me if I gave to Him. Perhaps that's why even now, I have no problem bringing my tithes and offerings to the house of the Lord. Not only that, but we always witnessed Mamma West deposit her envelope in the tithing plate even though we knew how little we had at home.

Sunday in Raleigh was clearly the "Lord's Day." We were not allowed to do any work on Sunday. Clothes were ironed and prepared on Saturday so that everything would be ready for Sunday. After services were over, the teenagers could walk "uptown" to Fayetteville Street, Raleigh's commercial area, and visit the State museums and walk around the Capital grounds. We could not attend movies or partake in any entertainment that involved secular music or dancing. Sunday was a Holy Day, and most families were found observing it. Religious habits and foundations were being

formed even then. I had no consciousness of it, but I was being molded for a life of service to the church.

At the age of fifteen, I relocated to Brooklyn, New York, where I lived with my uncle and aunt and their two daughters until I graduated high school.

Sunday mornings were different in New York. My family there was Roman Catholic; although my aunt had been reared in the Baptist Church in Raleigh. My two cousins attended All Saints Catholic School and we attended the 9:00 a.m. Mass on Sunday mornings. Mass was quite different from anything I had ever experienced. All of the "genuflecting" and "Hail Mary's" were quite boring to one who had become accustomed to extemporaneous prayers, gospel music, Methodist hymns and fiery preaching.

I even missed the "note choir" singing. This small group of elderly people would sing without benefit of instruments. They would get a rhythm going by patting their feet, and after singing the song through one time using the notes,(do-re-me-fa-so-la-ti-do) they would sing the verse and then moan it.

That, however, was in Raleigh. In Brooklyn, the priest spoke in Latin and, therefore, none of us could talk about a "message" on the way home as we had often done in Raleigh. For me, it was all too ritualistic, cold and formal. Aside from that, I couldn't partake of the Holy Eucharist because I was not Catholic. I had grown accustomed to receiving

Communion every first Sunday at Rush.

Sunday didn't seem like the "Lord's Day" in New York. After Mass, we would pack the car and go to the beach or into Manhattan for one of the many ethnic festivals that were being held. After Mass, we generally did whatever we wanted.

During that time, my uncle's oldest sister, Aunt Toolie, we called her, would come from her live-in domestic job and spend Friday night at our house. Aunt Toolie was a member of the Bibleway Church in Patterson, New Jersey. She would leave Brooklyn on Saturday afternoon by bus and go to Patterson to worship at Bibleway. I asked if I could go with her one weekend and that experience opened my eyes to an entirely new form of worship called Pentecostalism.

They worshipped in a small storefront church with a wood stove in the Sanctuary. A small dining room was located in the rear of the Sanctuary. A delicious dinner, including Aunt Toolie's homemade rolls was served every Sunday after worship.

Worship in Raleigh had been a good and positive experience but for the first time in my life, worship was really exciting at Bibleway. Everyone was "brother" or "sister" or "Elder" (in Bibleway, Aunt Toolie was Sister Mcketchen).

Although service at the Methodist Church was enjoyable, it was still traditionally Methodist. There was a method.

We strictly followed the traditional order of worship every Sunday even if the Holy Spirit wanted to move in a different way. Mrs. McCullough played the piano and Mrs. Thorpe read the announcements. Even until this day, the same women do the same things at Rush. A few of the older members would say an occasional "amen" or "thank you Jesus". A sister would get up to do the "holy dance" every now and then. One of the men would moan the same prayer every week. Most of the celebration came from the pulpit when Reverend Harris would get to the climax of his sermon.

Bibleway was different. Service started not with a procession of the choir, but with spontaneous testifying and singing -- songs I had never heard before. They had drums and tambourines and wash boards and an old piano. And, not just one older sister danced for the Lord, but it seemed like everybody, young and old, was on his feet during most of the service -- which went on for hours, unlike the one hour service at Rush Memorial.

It is clear to me now that I was not focusing on what the Bishop was preaching because I remember no theological conflicts entering my mind about what I had learned in the Methodist Church. I simply enjoyed being around the members of Bibleway and clapping my hands and stomping my feet to the lively music they made unto the Lord. Until this day, I have always believed that that little storefront church in Patterson, New Jersey awakened in me an enthusiasm for

making "a joyful noise unto the Lord." I love to praise the Lord!

I did not know the theology of the Apostolic Church. I did not know that they did not ordain women as ministers or elders. I did not notice the subservient role the women played.

Aunt Toolie never approved of my preaching God's word. She never once heard me preach nor did she visit the church I was pastoring before her death in 1987. I had been preaching for six years at that time. I was hurt because I saw her as a strong spiritual influence in my life - but her disapproval did not deter me.

At age nineteen, I started attending the Friendship Baptist Church in Jamaica, New York. I was later baptized there by immersion. The Baptist Church did not recognize my earlier "christening" in the Methodist Church. I enjoyed worshipping in the Baptist Church more than the Methodist Church because of their strong gospel music and gospel preaching. It never bothered me that I was in a church outside the denomination in which I was raised. I was being spiritually fed and that was all that mattered.

A New Theological Understanding

I didn't join another Methodist church until 1973, and that church was the Saint Paul African Methodist Episcopal Church in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Reverend John R.

Bryant, the Pastor of Saint Paul, brought me back to African Methodism. Saint Paul was the embodiment of everything my soul was searching for. The spirit of the Lord was truly in that place under pastor Bryant's leadership. Praise and Worship were the rule and not the exception. Reverend Bryant preached and the Word came alive in my heart and I asked the Lord Jesus Christ to forgive me of my sins and to come into my heart and be my personal Lord and Savior. That was the beginning of my "new life" in the church, and, more importantly, in Christ Jesus. I gained a new love and appreciation for the Word of God, both preached and written. The scripture took on new meaning. I now owned a personal bible (not just the huge family Bible in my living room). I now had a new understanding of being "saved," for Romans 10:9 says that "if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in thine heart that God has raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." Prior to that, I had not been asked if I were saved and if I wanted to receive the Lord as my personal Savior.

When I received my first Holy Communion after my salvation was secured, I cried a river of tears. Now I understood Isaiah 53:5, "but He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him and with His stripes we are healed."

As a child and young adult, I had always thought that

the Holy Ghost or Holy Spirit was a shout or the Holy Dance I sometimes saw on Sunday. Whenever someone expressed any emotion -- crying out, dancing, or running around the church, someone would say that the person "got the Holy Ghost in church today." To my understanding, Bibleway and Rush Memorial Church had the Holy Ghost. The Catholic Church did not.

At Saint Paul African Methodist Episcopal Church, I learned who the Bible says the Holy Spirit is and I invited Him to fill me with His power and to lead and control my life. My "upper room experience"[18] happened one Friday night after I had fasted and prayed for three days. There were about thirty other people in the room, some had already received the filling of the Holy Spirit, others were "tarrying." Some prayed extemporaneous prayers aloud. Others sang "Come on down, come on down, Lord let Your Holy Ghost come on down." Soon I was engulfed with a peace and a sense of calm like I had never experienced. At the same time, my whole body began to quiver and tears, rivers of tears, began to flow from my heart to my eyes. This was my "Pentecost" and Acts 2 came alive for me. I knew without a doubt that the Holy Spirit had come fully into my life. I fell to my knees in praise and thanksgiving even as others

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[18] It was in the "upper room" that the disciples and the women waited for the promise of the Holy Ghost to fall on them. Their lives were totally changed becasue of the empowering of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:1)

around me experienced His presence in other ways. Some spoke in tongues, others danced out of control, others fell out in a trance - some, like myself, lay prostrate before Him in praise and thanksgiving.

I am aware that there are scriptures that say when men were filled with the Holy Spirit they spoke in tongues such as Acts 19:6, "And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied."

It is interesting that these denominations, believing that speaking in tongues is the evidence of the Holy Spirit, prompt women to speak in tongues, but they omit the last part of the verse, "and prophesied." If women can speak in tongues, why can't women preach the Word of God, which ultimately is what prophesying is? Does not the prophet Joel declare:

> And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh. And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. And upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit. (Joel 2:28-29)

I had now been acquainted with five denominations, African Methodist Episcopal Zion, African Methodist Episcopal, Roman Catholic, Apostolic and Baptist. I had not seen women in ministry or strong leadership positions until I joined Saint Paul. It was always the men who were up front - speaking from the pulpit (except in Sunday School)

serving on the deacon, steward and trustee boards. Even the acolytes in the Roman Catholic Church were male.

I began to wonder why it was that the majority of worshippers in all of these churches were female, but the males were always in the positions of leadership.

I heard preaching and teaching on the Apostle Paul's view of women in the church: "and if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church" (I Corinthians 14:35). "But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven" (I Corinthians 11:5).

The preponderance of women in the majority of our local churches indicates that women have been steadfast in their commitment to the church and that they love the Lord in spite of the hardships they face in the church. This project revealed that women's needs (spiritual, social and cultural) are not being met in far too many local churches.

Our survey revealed that many, if not most, churches do not have any ongoing women's ministries operating. Much of this may have to do with the fact that since Judaism, women have been regarded as second class citizens or inferior to males in the church and society. Aida Besancon Spencer, writes the following in her work, Beyond The Curse writes: Many persons have referred to the Jewish daily prayer as proof of the low view of women in all Jewish eyes:

> Blessed is He who did not make me a Gentile;
> Blessed is He who did not make me a woman;
> Blessed is He who did not make me an uneducated man (or a slave) (Tosephta 7:16-18 on t. Ber. 13b or b. Menah 43b).[19]

The woman's seating in the Jewish Temple was indicative of this discrimination. The woman's court was located in the rear of the Temple (separated from her family members) just ahead of the Gentile court. The men were seated in the men's court located at the front of the Temple. Women were not allowed to study the Torah, the law, or join discussions on matters of the law. She was not allowed to converse with her husband, or men in general, in public and it was her primary duty to bear children, preferably male children, for her husband.

Many modern churches' theology still embraces Old Testament customs such as covering of the head, silencing of women, and forbidding women to teach, preach or hold certain offices (deacons, trustees or pastor). While the above views of women in the christian church come primarily from a distortion of Paul's writings. Responsible Biblical Scholarship shows that Paul was actually not against women ministers and was speaking from a cultural, not a theological standpoint. Dr. Renita Weems and Dr. Jacqueline Grant write on the issue of whether women should cover their heads in worship (I Corinthians 11:4-7). Dr. Weems writes

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[19] Aida Besancon Spencer, Beyond The Curse (New York: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985), 56.

the following in an article entitled, "We Have No Such Custom: To Cover or Not To Cover A Woman's Head."

> The women of Corinth were neither malcontents nor reprobates. They were women with their own interpretations of the traditions handed to them (11:2). Evidently the women had taken seriously and had found liberatory the idea that they were new creations in Christ, made in the image of God, they surely experienced as shame anything that obstructed, obscured, or denied this reality... To defend wearing veils Paul embarked upon a specious, obscure, and highly suspect argument about honor, glory, and angels and nature. It seems apparent that his feelings on the subject were not so much theological as they were based on custom and the desire to preserve the status quo. Paul first defends veil wearing on the basis of shame and honor. But we do not live in a culture where a woman's hair and its adornments are seen as enticing. A woman does not disgrace herself in our culture by cutting her hair, shaving her head, nor by leaving her head uncovered...[20]

Even the Apostle Paul, from whose writings most who hold these antiquated views of theology like to quote, wrote in Galatians 3:28; There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Paul's ministry, in fact, included and accepted women as demonstrated in the sixteenth chapter of Romans:

> I commend unto you Phoebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea: That ye receive her in the Lord as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you:

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[20] The A.M.E. Church Review, October/December, 1992

> for she hath been a succourer of many, and of myself also. (16:1-2)
>
> Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my helpers in Christ Jesus, who have for my life laid down their own necks; unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. (16:3-4)
>
> Likewise greet the church that is in their house. Salute my well beloved Epae'etus who is the firstfruits of Achaia unto Christ. (16:5)
>
> Greet Mary, who bestowed much labor on us. (16:6)
>
> Salute Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen, and my fellowprisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me. (16:7)
>
> Salute Tryphena and Tryphosa, who labored in the Lord. Salute the beloved Persis, which labored much in the Lord. (16:12)

These women are noted as co-workers with the Apostle Paul.

More importantly, these churches and denominations who denegrate women refuse to embrace the liberating theology of Jesus Christ Himself who was no respecter of persons. Throughout New Testament scripture Jesus related to women in an unorthodox manner, letting all know
that He loved and respected women just as He loved and respected men. His public conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well in St. John 4:5-29 was unacceptable in orthodox Jewish settings; for men did not speak with women in public. Jesus allowed the woman with the issue of blood to touch Him in St. Mark 5:25-34 (See Leviticus 15:25). He allowed Mary to sit at His feet (symbolizing teaching) at Lazarus' home in St. Luke 10:38-42. He forgave the woman caught in the act of adultery, St. John 8:3-11. In spite of

the fact that Jews did not regard the word of a woman as "good" Jesus announced His Resurrection to a woman, possibly a reformed harlot, and told her to go and tell this good news to His disciples (Matthew 28:10; Mark 16:9, Luke 24:10 and John 20:14). Jesus' behavior with women was not considered acceptable in traditional Jewish settings. His ministry to women demonstrated equal treatment of males and females without regard to customs or traditions.

Help Meet or Silent Partner in the Church

> And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the foul of the air and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him...And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man. (Genesis 2:20, 23)

My theological foundation is rooted and grounded in the church. From my childhood up to the present, my life has been centered in the church. The community and the home in which I was raised believed in God and there has never been a time in my life when I did not believe in God's existence and power. My family attended church regularly and I was taught to fear God and to serve Him. The church has been and remains an intricate part of my life. Spiritually, "...it is the mystery of a human-divine institution in which man can find light, pardon, and grace for the praise of

God's glory."[21]

The church is the called out people of God. The church represents a community of believers in the saving and restoring power of the Lord Jesus Christ. The church is Jesus' bride whom He will return to receive unto Himself. Jesus loves the church. All of her members are important to Him, both male and female. The church is neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female. I contend that the female in the church is as precious in God's sight as is the male. He wants the body to be one member:

> For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body so also is Christ. (I Corinthians 12:12)

> The church's one foundation
> Is Jesus Christ her Lord;
> She is His new creation
> By water and the Word;
> From Heav'n He came and sought her
> To be His holy bride;
> With His own blood He bought her,
> And for her life he died.[22]

I have chose to research and develop a mentoring program for African-American females in the Christian Church. This project flowed from my dissatisfaction with the lack of formal training, or mentoring that our young girls and women are afforded in the church, an institution

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[21] Dictionary of Biblical Theology (New York: Seabury Press) 1973), 72.

[22] Samuel S. Wesley, "The Church's One Foundation," A.M.E. Hymnal (Nashville: A.M.E. Church, 1954), 375

that should have a strong impact on our lives spiritually, culturally and socially.

> Black women's efforts to find a voice have occurred in at least three safe spaces. One location involves Black women's relationships with one another. In some cases, such as friendships and family interactions, these relationships are informal, private dealings among individuals. In other, as was the case during slavery (D. White 1985), in Black churches (Gilkes 1985), or in Black women's organizations (Gilkes 1982; Giddings 1988), more formal organizational ties have nurtured powerful Black women's communities. As mothers, daughters, sisters, and friends to one another, African-American women affirm one another (Myers 1980)[23]

Mentoring is beneficial to the positive development of the African-American female. African-American females are unique. They often bear an undue burden in our society, as has been the case since we were brought to these foreign shores from the Motherland, Africa. Collins agrees:

> All African-Americans share the common experience of being Black women in a society that denigrates women of African descent. This commonality of experience suggests that certain characteristic themes will be prominent in a Black woman's standpoint.[24]

She constantly bears the burden of racism as well as sexism. Her self-esteem is apt to be lower than her white sisters because the society in which she lives does not value her beauty, abilities or her potential. She must be

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[23] Collins, 96.

[24] Ibid.

nurtured in order to fulfill her God-given role as "help meet."

> Take heed, therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood. (Acts 20:28)

A casual glance at our churches will, I believe, reveal the fact that there is a dire need for such mentoring. Most will agree that Black women make up the larger population of our churches. Collins writes:

> Evelyn Brooks (1983) and Jacqueline Grant (1982) identify the church as one key institution whose centrality to Black community development may have come at the expense of many of the African-American women who constitute the bulk of its membership. Grant asserts, "it is often said that women are the "backbone" of the church. On the surface, this may appear to be a compliment.... It has become apparent to me that most of the ministers who use this term are referring to location rather than function. What they really mean is that women are in the "background" and should be kept there.[25]

Too many African American women are lacking in spiritual and cultural awareness as well as social maturity, and are experiencing the same pitfalls that Afican American women outside the church are encountering. There is a lack of knowledge of the Word of God and of our African Heritage; and as a result of teenage pregnancy, school drop-outs, low

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[25] Ibid, 87.

self-esteem, lack of purpose and direction, and lack of morals are as prevalent among church going African American females as well as the unchurched. Black women must develop physically, socially, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually to become whole and complete women. They need responsible guidance and proper models from the African American community in order to succeed. Mary C. Lewis writes:

> Throughout adolescence, Black females are struggling to define their cultural selves. This is basically a social, emotional and psychological struggle. Thus, a Black female adolescent is seeking to understand what place her Blackness holds in her life, in her view of herself, how she feels about that view, and in what ways society influences her self-image.[26]

The church has been remiss in her responsibility to minister to the "total woman." For while the church has received and presented salvation unto her, the church has not ministered to her total needs. She needs to be saved from sin, yes, but she also needs to be delivered from inbred low self-esteem. She needs salvation, yes, but she also needs both men and women to lead her through a process of becoming an African American woman, by the teaching of the Word of God from an Africentric perspective. For while nature will grow her body and develop her physically ("and

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[26] Mary C. Lewis, Herstory: Black Female Rites of Passage (Chicago: Africa American Images, 1988), 10.

the maid was fair and beautiful" - Esther 2:7), only God can positively develop her mind and her will ("...I also and my maidens will fast likewise" - Esther 4:16). The church must minister to the whole woman!

Biblical research reveals that women, no matter what their culture, need positive mentors. The Book of Ruth demonstrates how the older woman can guide and instruct young women into:

(1) Positive self lifestyles

> And she said, I pray you, let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves so she came, and hath continued even from the morning until now, that she tarried a little in the house (Ruth 2:7).

(2) Cultural Awareness

> And Ruth said, Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God (Ruth 1:16).
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> And Ruth the Moabitess said, He said unto me also, Thou shalt keep fast by my young men, until they have ended all my harvest. And Naomi said unto Ruth her daughter-in-law, It is good, my daughter, that thou go out with his maidens, that they meet thee not in any other field. So she kept fast by the maidens of Boaz to glean unto the end of barley harvest and of wheat harvest; and dwelt with her mother-in-law (Ruth 2:21-23).

(3) Prepare themselves for marriage

> Then Naomi her mother-in-law said unto

her, My daughter, shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee? And now is not Boaz of our kindred, with those maidens thou wast? Behold, he winnoweth barley tonight in the threshing floor. Wash thyself therefore, and anoint thee, and put thy raiment upon thee, and get thee down to the floor but make not thyself known unto the man, until he shall have done eating and drinking. And it shall be, when he lieth down, that thou shalt go in, and uncover his feet, and lay thee down; and he will tell thee what thou shalt do. And she went down into the floor, and did according to all that her mother-in-law bade her. And when Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of corn and she came softly, and uncovered his feet, and laid her down. And it came to pass at midnight, that the man was afraid, and turned himself and, behold, a woman lay at his feet. And he said, Who are thou? And she answered, I am Ruth thine handmaid spread before thy skirt over thine handmaid; for thou art a near kinsman. And he said, Blessed be thou of the Lord, my daughter for thou hast shown more kindness in the latter end than at the beginning, inasmuch as thou followest not young men, whether poor or rich. And now, my daughter, fear not; I will do to thee all that thou requirest for all the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman. And now it is true that I am thy near kinsman howbeit there is a kinsman nearer than I. Tarry this night, and it shall be in the morning, that if he will perform unto thee the part of a kinsman, well; let him do the kinsman's part but if he will not do the part of a kinsman to thee, then will I do the part of a kinsman to thee, as the Lord liveth lie down until the morning (Ruth 3:1-13).

This principle is also prescribed in New Testament scripture recorded in Titus 2:1-5

> But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience. The aged women likewise, that they be in behavior as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; that they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed.

Older women are to teach or mentor young women in proper scriptural, social and cultural behavior. Women must be mentored so that they, like Naomi, can reach back and give positive advice and direction to the younger women. If this is not done, or what is worse, if the younger women witness a negative unholy, lifestyle from the adults they see and interact with on a day to day basis, the young women will often go astray. The results are seen in multiple teenage pregnancies and abortions, school drop outs, welfare dependancy, as well as drug abuse. I have watched it happen time and time again in the community. I serve, and am all the more convinced that the word of God is right when it says "the aged women, likewise, that they be in behavior as becometh holiness." (Titus 2)

The young women in the community have witnessed the "unholy" life styles of many of the older women in the community and hav followed their example. Many of the young women are the product of teenage mothers. They have not had the benefit of a "traditional" family lifestyle where mother

and father are married and are raising the children together. They enteract on a day to day basis with women who are school dropouts, welfare reciepients and drug abusers. I am not saying that all of the above is "unholy" or sinful, but it certainly sets a poor example for young women who witness their lifestyles. The African American community needs more women who will exhibit "behavior as becometh holiness."

The Book of Esther unfolds for us again, the need for preparation and guidance in the life of women who will be God's instruments in our various places in society and church. In the Book of Esther, we see a woman being groomed for an adult role using components necessary for womanhood. Herein, we find that men can, and should, be a part of the female's mentoring process.

> So it came to pass, when the King's commandment and his decree was heard, and when many maidens were gathered together unto Sushan the palace, to the custody of Hegai, that Esther was brought also unto the king's house, to the custody of Hagai, keeper of the women. And the maiden pleased him, and she obtained kindness of him; and he speedily gave her things for purification, with such things as belonged to her, and seven maidens, which were meet to be given her, out of the king's house and he preferred her and her maids unto the best place of the house of the woman (Esther 2:8,9).

I contend, based on my own personal experiences of being raised in the christian church, that African-American girls are not receiving adequate preparation for positive

lifestyles and for becoming builders of our community both spiritually and culturally. It is appalling to me that never in my childhood or adult experiences in the churches, until I joined Saint Paul African Methodist Episcopal Church, did the churches hold classes or seminars for young girls or women to talk about who we are in God's church and God's plan.

The churches I attended did not address the special needs and concerns of young girls and women until I encountered Cecelia Williams Bryant and the Missionary Society of Saint Paul African Methodist Episcopal Church. It was then that I was exposed to what is now called "Women's Ministries" - workshops, seminars, luncheons, overnight retreats, rap sessions, and women's Bible studies. In 1978, she organized **"Behold The Woman,"** an international ecumenical conference developed to teach women the art of Spiritual Discipline. In her work, **Kiamsha**, Reverend Williams Bryant produces a spiritual discipline for African-American women.

Women make up the vast majority in most of our christian churches. The question then becomes, if woman was created to be "help meet" for man, why are there not more programs that speak directly to the needs of these women, both young and old? The answer could lie in the fact that the majority of our christian churches are headed by males who may not be sensitive to the special needs of females in

their congregations. The need is greater today with more girls growing up in broken homes, drug infested homes, foster homes, abusive homes and homes where the adults are unchurched and untrained academically. Statistics show a continuing rise in teenage pregnancy, drug abusers, and school drop-outs, even among christian females. These young females need guidance and support. They need positive christian role models, both male and female, to help guide them into womanhood. If the church is to mold lives for Christ, she must pay special attention to this unique part of the congregation, the young Black female.[27]

All too often the needs of women, which can be quite different from those of their male counterparts, in our churches are grossly overlooked. I do not believe this to be God's will. Black adolescent females defy simplification. They need and deserve special mentors to help guide them through this difficult period of development. I do not believe that God is pleased that women are not being properly trained to live positive, productive christian lives.

Woman was created for a purpose, a purpose that neither man nor beast could fill. The Church of God cannot afford to overlook the female population in her midst. Rather, the church must purpose to assist in the development process of

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[27] Cecelia Williams Bryant, Kiamsha, (Baltimore: Akosua Visions, 1991).

women who were created to be the "help meet" of men.

> And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him and help meet for him. (Genesis 2:18).

If she is to accomplish this, she must receive preparation and instruction. This instruction must prepare her to be "help meet" in the areas of home, church, community, nation and the world. The church already has the people resources for this preparation and instruction. In her membership can be found people from all walks of life. We must simply use what God has already given us to mentor our young Black females.

My particular interest is spiritual, social and cultural development of African-American females. It is my contention that this group of women desperately need this mentoring process, perhaps even moreso than the European female simply because they have the issues of racial discrimination to deal with as well as the myriad of other discriminations that women in this society must contend with. However, as in the case of Esther (Hadassah), although the Black female is viewed as the least likely to succeed, when given a chance she will rise to the top.

> And the king loved Esther above all the women, and she obtained grace and favour in his sight more than all the virgins; so that he set the royal crown upon her head, and made her queen instead of Vashti (Esther 2:17).

Esther, like today's young Black female, had several

obstacles to being chosen as queen (1) she was a foreigner and did not know the customs well, (2) she came from an oppressed people, and (3) she was struggling for her survival as well as the survival of her people.

Dr. Renita Weems, in her work Just A Sister Away, discusses the story of Hagar, an Egyptian slave girl, as she flees from Sarai, her mistress in a chapter entitled, "A Mistress, A Maid, and No Mercy."

> Upon finding Hagar at a spring in the wilderness (Genesis 16:7), the angel of the Lord asked the runaway slave the unavoidable question 'Hagar, maid of Sarai, where have you come from; and where are you going?' (Genesis 16:8). Hagar was not only broken, she was empty as well, too empty to seize her future. From whence she had come, she was all too aware "I am fleeing from my mistress..." (Genesis 16:8). But where she was headed, unfortunately, Hagar could not answer."[28]

The angel's question to Hagar, "where have you come from and where are you going?" is the question for which the church must help African-American females find answers. Dr. Weems, throughout this important work, stresses the importance of Black women bonding together to strengthen and support one another as we answer the probing question of the angel in Genesis 16:8.

The African-American female must be nurtured by other women in the African-American tradition -- women who know and serve God; women who have survived slavery in America;

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[28] Weems, 12-13.

women who have survived abuse (sexual and mental), racism and sexism; women who have been denied equal rights to education and jobs; women who know and love the African tradition and history; women who can be positive mentors to other women who must now come through the "coals of fire" that have been conquered by our foremothers on these foreign shores; women who have beat the odds; women who refused and yet refuse to be relegated to a kitchen or bedroom or nursery; women like the one Langston Hughes describes in his poem, "Mother to Son" -

"...life for me ain't been no crystal stair."[29]

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[29] Langston Hughes, Selected Poems Langston Hughes (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 187

CHAPTER FOUR

THE CONTEXT OF MINISTRY

HISTORICAL STATEMENT OF THE AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

The ministerial context in which I serve is located, one might say hidden, at the border of the small but historic East Towson community, in Baltimore County, the State of Maryland. The church was organized in 1855 and was then named Mount Calvary Methodist Protestant Church. She became Mount Calvary African Methodist Episcopal Church when the leaders of the small church petitioned the African Methodist Episcopal Church to supply her with preachers to minister the word to the people of this newly formed congregation. Mount Calvary's history does not record the date of this petition. As a result of this request, Mount Calvary became a part of a connection of churches whose history began sixty eight years earlier in 1787 under the leadership of a former slave named Richard Allen.

The African Methodist Episcopal Church was born out of a protest movement. The protest, unlike John and Charles Wesley the fathers of Methodism, was not the result of doctrinal differences; rather it was a matter of racial

discrimination. The Doctrine and Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church 1992 records the following account:

> In November, 1787, the coloured people belonging to the Methodist Society in Philadelphia convened together in order to take into consideration the evils under which they laboured, arising from the unkind treatment of their white brethren, who considered them a nuisance in the house of worship, and even pulled them off their knees while in the act of prayer, and ordered them to the back seats. From these, and various other acts of unchristian conduct, we considered it our duty to devise a plan in order to build a house of our own, to worship God under our own vine and fig tree in this undertaking, we met with great opposition from an elder of the Methodist church (J.M.C.) who threatened, that if we did not give up the building, erase our names from the subscription paper, and make acknowledgements for having attempted such a thing, that in three months we should all be publicly expelled from the Methodist Society. Not considering ourselves bound to obey this injunction, and being fully satisfied we should be treated without mercy, we sent in our resignations...
>
> In 1793, the number of serious people in colour, being greatly increased, they were of different opinions respecting the mode of religious worship; and, as many felt a strong partiality for that adopted by Methodists. Richard Allen, with the advice of some of his brethren, proposed erecting a place of worship on his own ground, and at his own expense, as an African Methodist Meeting-house. As soon as the preachers of the white Methodist church in Philadelphia came to the knowledge of this, they opposed it with all their might insisting that the house should be made over to the conference or they would publish us in the newspaper as imposing to the public, as we were not Methodists. However, the building went on and when we finished, we invited Francis Asbury, then Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, to

open the house for Divine Service; which invitation he accepted and the house was named BETHEL...

About this time, our coloured friends at Baltimore were treated in a similar manner by the white preachers and trustees, and many of them drove away, who were disposed to seek a place to worship for themselves, rather than go to law...

Many of the coloured people in other places were in a situation nearly like those of Philadelphia and Baltimore, which induced us in April, 1816, to call a general meeting by way of conference. Delegates from Baltimore and other places met in Philadelphia and taking into consideration their grievances, and in order to secure their privileges, promote union and harmony among themselves, it was resolved, "That the people of Philadelphia, Baltimore, and all other places who should unite with them shall become one body under the name of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. We have deemed it expedient to have a form of Discipline, whereby we may guide our people in the fear of God, in the unity of the Spirit, and in the bonds of peace, and preserve us from that spiritual despotism which we have so recently experienced, remembering that we are not to lord it over God's heritage as greedy dogs that can never have enough, but with long-suffering and bowels of compassion to bear each other's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ; praying that our mutual striving together for the promulgation of the gospel may be crowned with

abundant success, we remain your affectionate servants in the kingdom and patience of the Prince of Peace.

Richard Allen/s

Daniel Coker/s

James Champion/s[30]

Reverend Richard Allen was elected the first Bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church at that Baltimore Conference in 1816 and served the church in that capacity for fifteen years. Following Allen's legacy are 111 other Bishops who have been duly elected to serve the "Church of Allen" in this high and noble office.

The result of this struggle by a group of men and women fresh out of slavery is a world wide church. The "Church of Allen" as she is commonly called, celebrated her Bicentennial in 1987 in the city of her birth, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The Saint George's Episcopal Church from which she took her flight is now a museum for spectators to view. But, the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church at 6th and Lombard, is alive and thriving with the Spirit of God. Allen and his wife and co-laborer, Sarah Allen, are entombed in the basement of Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia.

The "Church of Allen" lives in nineteen Episcopal

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[30] Compilation Committee, eds., African Methodist Episcopal Church: The Book of Discipline (Nashville: AMEC Publishing House, 1988), 19-22.

Districts, thirteen located within the United States of America and six outside the continental United States.

Mount Calvary is a part of the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

AFRICAN -- refers to our heritage; **METHODIST** -- refers to our doctrine; and **EPISCOPAL** -- refers to our form of governance.

THE AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH HAS A GREAT HISTORY. THE AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH HAS POTENTIAL FOR A GREAT FUTURE.

The Doctrine and Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church 1992 records **The Doctrinal Affirmative of the African Methodist Episcopal Church.**

Section I. The Mission and Purpose of the Church

The Mission of the African Methodist Episcopal Church is to minister to the spiritual, intellectual, physical and emotional, and environmental needs of all people by spreading Christ's liberating gospel through word and deed. At every level of the Connection and in every local church, the African Methodist Episcopal Church shall engage in carrying out the spirit of the original Free African Society, out of which the A.M.E. Church evolved that is, to seek out and save the lost, and serve the needy through a continuing program of (1) preaching the gospel, (2) feeding the hungry, (3) clothing the naked, (4) housing the homeless, (5) cheering the fallen, (6) providing jobs for

the jobless, (7) administering to the need of those in prisons, hospitals, nursing homes, asylums and mental institutions, senior citizens' homes, caring for the sick, the shut-in, the mentally and socially disturbed, and (8) encouraging thrift and economic advancement.[31]

Section II. Articles of Religion

1. Of Faith in the Holy Trinity

There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body or parts, of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; the Maker and Preserver of all things, both visible and invisible. And in unity of this God-head, there are three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity - the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

2. Of the Word, or Son of God, Who Was Made Very Man

The Son, who is the Word of the Father, the very and eternal God, of one substance with the Father, took man's nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin; so that two whole and perfect natures, that is to say, the God-head and manhood, were joined together in one person never to be divided; whereof is one Christ, very God and very Man, who truly suffered, was crucified, dead and buried, to reconcile his Father to us, and to be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but also for the actual sins of men.

3. Of the Resurrection of Christ

Christ did truly rise again from the dead, and took again his body with all things appertaining to the perfection of man's nature, wherewith he ascended into heaven, and there sitteth until he return to judge all men at the last day.

4. Of the Holy Ghost

The Holy Ghost, proceeding from the Father and the Son, is of one substance, majesty, and glory with the Father and the Son, very and eternal God.

5. Of the Sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures for

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[31] Ibid., 27

Salvation

The Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation; so that whatever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation. In the name of the Holy Scripture, we do understand those canonical books of the Old and New Testament, of whose authority was never any doubt in the church.

All the Books of the New Testament, as they are commonly received, we do receive and account canonical.

6. Of the Old Testament

The Old Testament is not contrary to the New; for both in the Old and the New Testament, everlasting life is offered to mankind by Christ, who is the only Mediator between God and man, being both God and man. Wherefore, they are not to be heard, who feign that the old fathers did look only for transitory promises. Although the law given from God by Moses, as touching ceremonies and rites, doth not bind Christians, nor ought the civil precepts thereof of necessity be received in any commonwealth yet notwithstanding, no Christian whatsoever is free from the obedience of the Commandments, which are called moral.

7. Of Original or Birth Sin

Original sin standeth not in the following of Adam (as the Pelagians do vainly talk), but it is the corruption of the nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam, whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and of his own nature inclined to evil, and that continually.

8. Of Free Will

The condition of man after the fall of Adam is such that he cannot turn and prepare himself, by his own natural strength and works, to faith, and calling upon God; wherefore, we have no power to do good work, pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Christ preventing us, that we may have a good will, and working with us, when we have that good will.

9. Of the Justification of Man

We are accounted righteous before God only for the merit of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, by faith, and not for our own works or deservings; wherefore, that we are

justified by faith only, is a most wholesome doctrine, and very full of comfort.

10. Of Good Works

Although good works, which are the fruit of faith, and follow after justification, cannot put away our sins, and endure the severity of God's judgments yet are they pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ, and spring out of a true and lively faith, insomuch that by them a lively faith may be as evidently known, as a tree is discerned by its fruit.

11. Of Works of Supererogation

Voluntary works, besides, over and above God's Commandments, which they call works of supererogation, cannot be taught without arrogancy and impiety. For by them men do declare that they do not only render unto God as much as they are bound to do, but that they do more for His sake than of bounden duty is required; whereas Christ said plainly, "When ye have done all that is commanded you, say, we are unprofitable servants."

12. Of Sin After Justification

Not every sin willingly committed after justification is the sin against the Holy Ghost, and unpardonable. Wherefore, the grant of repentance is not to be denied to such as fall into sin after justification. After we have received the Holy Ghost, we may depart from grace given, and fall into sin, and, by the grace of God, rise again, and amend our lives. And therefore they are to be condemned who say they can do no more sin as long as they live here; or deny the place of forgiveness to such as truly repent.

13. Of the Church

The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments duly administered according to Christ's ordinance, in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same.

14. Of Purgatory

The Romish doctrine concerning purgatory, pardon, worshipping and adoration, as well as of images, as of relics, and also invocations of saints, is a fond thing, vainly invented, and grounded upon no warrant of Scripture, but repugnant of the Word of God.

15. Of Speaking in the Congregation in Such a Tongue as

the People Understand

It is a thing plainly repugnant to the Word of God, and the custom of the primitive church, to have public prayer in the church, or to minister the Sacraments, in a tongue not understood by the people.

16. Of the Sacraments

Sacraments ordained of Christ are not only badges or tokens of Christian men's profession, but rather they are certain signs of grace, and God's good will toward us, by the which he doth work visibly in us, and doth not only quicken, but also strengthen and confirm our faith in him.

There are two Sacraments ordained of Christ our Lord, in the Gospel; that is to say, Baptism and the Supper of the Lord.

Those five commonly called sacraments, that is to say, Confirmation, Penance, Order, Matrimony, and Extreme Unction, are not to be counted for Sacraments of the Gospel; being such as have partly grown out of the corrupt following of the Apostles; and partly are states of life allowed in the Scriptures, but yet have not the like nature of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, because they have not any visible sign, or ceremony ordained of God.

The Sacraments were not ordained of Christ to be gazed upon, or to be carried about; but that we should duly use them. And in such only as worthily received the same, they have a wholesome effect or operation; but they that receive them unworthily, purchase to themselves condemnation, as St. Paul saith.

17. Of Baptism

Baptism is not only a sign of profession, and mark of difference; but it is also a sign of regeneration, or the new birth. The baptism of young children is to be retained in the church.

18. Of the Lord's Supper

The Supper of the Lord is not only a sign of the love that Christians ought to have among themselves one to another, but rather is a Sacrament of our redemption by Christ's death; insomuch, that to such as rightly, worthily, and with faith receive the same, the bread which we break is a partaking of the body of Christ; and likewise the cup of blessing is a partaking of the blood of Christ.

Transubstantiation, or the change of the substance of bread and wine in the Supper of our Lord, cannot be proved by Holy Writ; but is repugnant to the plain words of Scripture, overthroweth the nature of a sacrament, and hath given occasion to many superstitions.

The body of Christ is given, taken and eaten in the Supper, only after a heavenly and spiritual manner. And the means whereby the body of Christ is received and eaten in the Supper, is faith.

The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper is not by Christ's ordinance reserved, carried about, lifted up, or worshipped.

19. Of Both Kinds

The cup of the Lord is not to be denied to the lay people for both the parts of the Lord's Supper, by Christ's ordinance and commandment, ought to be administered to all Christians alike.

20. Of the One Oblation of Christ, finished upon the Cross

The offering of Christ, once made, is that perfect redemption, propitiation, and satisfaction for all the sins of the whole world, both original and actual; and there is none other satisfaction for sin but that alone. Wherefore, the sacraments of masses, in the which it is commonly said that the priest doth offer Christ for the quick and the dead, to have remission of pain or guilt, is a blasphemous fable, and dangerous deceit.

21. Of the Marriage of Ministers

The ministers of Christ are not commanded by God's law either to vow the estate of single life, or to abstain from marriage; therefore, it is lawful for them, as for all other Christians, to marry at their own discretion, as they shall judge the same to serve best to godliness.

22. Of the Rites and Ceremonies of Churches

It is not necessary that rites and ceremonies should in all places be the same, or exactly alike; for they have been always different, and may be changed according to the diversity of countries, times, and men's manners, so that nothing be ordained against God's Word. Whosoever, through his private judgment, willingly and purposely, doth openly break the rites and ceremonies of the church to which he

belongs, which are not repugnant to the Word of God, and are ordained and approved by common authority, out to be rebuked openly, that others may fear to do the like, as one that offendeth against the common order of the church, and woundeth the consciences of weak brethren.

Every particular church may ordain, change, or abolish rites and ceremonies so that all things may be done to edification.

23. Of the Rulers of the United States of America

The President, the Congress, the General Assemblies, the Governors, and the Councils of States, as the delegates of the people, are the rulers of the United States of America, according to the division of power made to them by the Constitution of the United States, and by the constitutions of their respective states. And the said states are a sovereign and independent nation, and ought not to be subject to any foreign jurisdiction.*

(*Obedience to Civil Government, however, is one of the principal duties of all men, and was honored by our Lord and His Apostles. Though differing in form and policy, all righteous governments rightfully commend the obedience, loyalty, support, and defense of all Christian men and women as that they control and protect.)

24. Of Christian Men's Goods

The riches and goods of Christians are not common as touching the right, title, and possession of the same, as some do falsely boast. Notwithstanding, every man ought, of such things as he possesseth, liberally, to give alms to the poor, according to his ability.

25. Of a Christian Man's Oath

As we confess that vain and rash swearing is forbidden Christian men by our Lord Jesus and James, His apostle, so we judge that the Christian religion doth not prohibit, but that a man may swear when the magistrate requireth, in a cause of faith and charity, so it be done according to the prophet's teaching, in justice, judgment, and truth.[32]

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[32] Ibid., 27-33

Our basic statement of faith is **The Apostles' Creed**

> I BELIEVE IN GOD THE FATHER ALMIGHTY, Maker of heaven and earth; AND IN JESUS CHRIST His only Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried;the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; From thence He shall come judge the quick and the dead, I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT; the holy catholic church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and life everlasting - AMEN.[33]

In brief, the Apostles' Creed states our faith in

1. God the Father.
2. Jesus Christ His only Son.
3. The Holy Spirit.
4. The Church
5. Forgiveness of Sins.
6. The Resurrection.
7. Life Everlasting.

History and Overview of the East Towson Community

The historic African American Community of East Towson in 1993, is a quiet residential community with tree lined streets lying on the eastern fringe of the Towsontown Center (See map 1). Historically, it is the oldest of the Central Towson residential communities and enjoys many advantages due to this proximity. There have also been development pressures and traffic issues related to its location.

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[33] Ibid.

The original property owners were freed slaves who until 1830, had been in service at the Hampton Mansion. The East Towson community is the only remaining portion of the larger African-American community that from 1830 to 1960 extended as far as the York Road and Bosley Avenue area, in an area known as "Sandy Bottom," and in north and west Towson. The north and west Towson African American communities no longer exist. The newly reconstructed Mount Olive Baptist Church and church owned duplex located on the southwest corner of York and Bosley are the only remaining structures in an area that has changed over the years to a commercial strip development.

In spite of their economic hardships, this tightly knit community of African Americans remained steadfast. The 140 year old community, started by former slaves, now stands a chance at rejuvination. A housing project named "Harris Hills" (after a former slave who owned property in the area), is underway in the East Towson Community. These 70 units, 17 Townhouses and Condominiums, were jointly developed with private sector intrest groups and government funding to provide opportunities for young persons who formerly lived in Towson but could not affort to buy homes in the community of their birth. The future of East Towson looks promising.

Mount Calvary A Brief Historical Statement

In 1855, a group of christians met to plan a new church

in Towson, Maryland. This group, under the leadership of Reverend Alfred Hammond, worshipped at the old Relief Association of Baltimore County. James H. Smith, President, and others witnessed that for and in consideration of the sum of fifty dollars paid by the pastor and all trustees of Mount Calvary Methodist Episcopal Protestant Church of Baltimore County, they acquired the present site we continue to enjoy for worship.

The same body contacted the African Methodist Episcopal Conference requesting pastors to fill their pulpit. A gentleman's agreement was made. The African Methodist Episcopal Conference would supply the pastors; however, we also had to agree to assume all financial obligations subject to churches in the African Methodist Episcopal Conference.

Mount Calvary's pulpit has enjoyed a parade of pastors, most recently 1944, The Reverend Paul A. Scott; 1945, The Reverend Raymond Smith; 1946-1948, The Reverend G. A. Grady; 1949-1952, The Reverend E. B. Burch; 1952-1953, The Reverend C. E. Walden, Sr.; 1954-1966, The Reverend Richard P. Hall; 1966-1973, The Reverend Reginald Boston; 1974-1986, The Reverend William Gray, III; and 1986 to the present; The Reverend Ann Farrar Lightner.

In the 1940's, Reverend Scott helped to build an annex which housed a kitchen, a dining area and our first indoor convenience room. Later, Reverend Burch and Reverend Hall

continued to renovate and beautify the sanctuary.

In 1969, a fire totally destroyed our church. Reverend Boston, Pastor at that time, moved our congregation to the First Lutheran Church on Burke Avenue in Towson where we worshipped for almost three years.

The new Mount Calvary building was begun in March, 1971. Dedication was held Sunday, November 28, 1971 at 300 p.m.

In 1973, The Reverend William A. Gray, III became our Pastor. Under Reverend Gray's leadership, the Lord blessed us tremendously in acquiring central air conditioning, a new chancel, an added piece of land, and we were debt free from major expenses.

Reverend Lightner is our first female Pastor. Under her leadership, Mount Calvary has purchased a new van, started a weekly radio ministry,added an 8am Sunday Worship Service and some eighteen other ministries. They include

1. Pastor's Bible Study
2. Youth Bible Study
3. Hour of Power
4. Men's Bible Study
5. After School Tutorial Program
6. Singles Ministry
7. Married Couples Ministry
8. "Sisters Sharing"
9. New Members Class of Instruction
10. Fasting And Prayer Groups
11. Lay Person's Sick And Shut-In Visitation
13. Class Leaders Council
14. Youth Drama Ministry
15. Youth Drum Classes
16. Oversees Outreach
17. Big Brothers
18. Parenting Ministry

The Mount Calvary African Methodist Episcopal Church, with approximately 300 congregants, is known as an anchor for the East Towson community -- both a physical and a spiritual anchor.

Years ago, before the exodus of Blacks from East Towson, the community was a close knit family affair unit. But because many Blacks did not own property they were forced to relocate. About 30 years ago, the small Black community of Sandy Bottom was completely removed. In the 1950's, Blacks were not economically privileged to rent or buy homes in the white sections, of Towson, therefore, the majority of these historic families were forced into Baltimore City. Most of these families continued their religious alliance to their Towson based churches. One of our families, the Johnson's who were born and raised in Towson, was noted in a local newspaper for having four generations in Mt. Calvary Church. (See Appendix C)

Even though many skilled persons attend Mount Calvary, we have been taught to share in a "Bond of Unity" -- so we all work together using whatever gifts and talents God has given us to build His kingdom. We are public relations, television personnel, television newsmen, sanitation engineers, secretaries, bus drivers, health care specialists, beauty specialists, welfare recipients, day care operators, school aides, library aides, teachers, retired school principals, social service workers, federal

government administrators, juvenile service specialists, food specialists, computer operators, dental assistants, tax examiners, real estate salespersons, financial auditors, race track operators and unemployed. Throughout our congregation and the Towson community, there are persons who have different levels of education. Many are illiterate while others have completed high school, college and graduate school. There are no doctorate level persons presently serving in our community, however, two are in process.

As in any congregation, we have our share of challenges, as we continue to teach, help and support single parents, teenage mothers and fathers, persons living with AIDS, drug users and alcoholics. We also strive to minister to our wheelchair members and retirees.

We are a fasting and praying church. Our witnessing has resulted in a most active male population who are working diligently in the church and growing strong in the faith.

Two other Black churches, Mount Olive Baptist and Saint James African Union Methodist Protestant, along with Mount Calvary African Methodist Episcopal, have served this historic community for well over 100 years.

In the 1990's, we have witnessed a reversal of the exodus. We are experiencing a tremendous growth of new christians joining us at Mount Calvary, so much so that we

have been forced to start a building program in order to accommodate the membership and ministries needed for our community. An additional 800 a.m. worship service has been started to accommodate our pressing need for worship space.

Many of our new members travel from Baltimore City and other parts of Baltimore County for worship at Mount Calvary weekly. The rapid growth of Mt. Calvary forced us to add an additional Sunday worship service in order to accommodate our membership. This rapid growth in this once traditional "family run church" has naturally changed the aura of a "family run church" to a more ministry oriented church. The members are friendly and loving toward one another. The old members have joined hands and heart to work for the building of God's kingdom here on earth.

The original Mt. Calvary which was erected in 1855 burned to the ground in 1968. The present facility, built in 1971, has a seating capacity of only 80 persons in the sanctuary pews. The choir loft seats approximately 30 and the dining room seats approximately 80, theater style. The building also houses a small kitchen, choir room, finance room , pastor's office and two bathrooms.

On Sunday morning, we use our sanctuary and dining room for worship as we have rapidly outgrown our present sanctuary. **Praise be to God!**

Mount Calvary is open seven days a week to accommodate her many activities. In the past six years, we

have grown not only numerically, but programmatically. As we strive to become a church that is "the Hub of the Black Community," we seek to provide services that are needed in our community. In addition to bible study, choir rehearsals and board meetings, ministry takes place weekly. Our after school tutorial program is now in its fourth year of operation. The "Mighty Men of Valor" meet weekly with up to twelve men discussing issues relevant to the Black christian man. Other ministries include Sisters Sharing and ministry to young women twelve to thirty years of age. The goal is to enhance sisterhood and increase levels of self-esteem as we educate our sisters about their potential in life. We also have a Married Couples' Ministry, a Single's Ministry and more (See Annual Conference Reports).

Mount Calvary's young people are very active in the life of the church. They participate in our two youth choirs, play instruments, write, direct and act in their own productions, visit nursing homes and hospitals and actively participate in worship services and the study of God's word.

As each segment of our congregation studies the Bible in our weekly classes and Sunday School, we move closer toward our church-wide theme "Growing From Membership to Discipleship."

Mount Calvary is becoming a strong tithing church. Our stewardship has grown from an annual budget of $54,000.00 in 1986 to $198,000.00 in 1993. The majority of these funds

come through our tithing program. All officers of Mount Calvary must be tithers.

Our church is working towards building a facility that will adequately house our worship services and other church ministries. We have been given approximately a half acre of land adjacent to our present facility on which we are constructing a 350 seat Sanctuary. In addition to the Sanctuary, the new facility will house an education building, dining room and kitchen, as well as administrative offices and a nursery.

With this new facility, we will be able to better house our present ministries and begin new ministries such as senior citizen and day care centers. We can look forward to hosting District meetings, community forums and workshops that will serve to further educate our community.

Although we have been able to achieve much with little resources, our vision is greater than the physical building. We desire to perform a greater ministry to single parents, drug abusers, alcoholics, persons living with AIDS, welfare recipients,at risk young people and pregnant teenagers.

We believe that if we can reach the youth of our church, the Mount Calvary of tomorrow will be a greater witness to the power of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ to make a difference in the life of His disciples.

Through a strong, positive Afrocentric ministry that includes a detailed study of our African heritage and an

exhibition of positive Afrocentric lifestyles and achievements, our young people will gain more discipline and self-esteem to become stronger as a nation of Black men and women.

A Closer Look

The women of Towson and the Mount Calvary African Methodist Episcopal Church are a complex group. The church is over 100 years old, and many of the women have been a part of the church all of their lives. While there is a sizable number of senior women active in the church family, the majority of the women are between the ages of twenty-one and sixty years of age. The same statistics hold true for the men at Mount Calvary.

The difficulty I encountered with this project was that the women, mostly the Towson natives, have known each other all of their lives and most are related. I learned first hand at Mount Calvary that "familiarity breeds contempt." The women were "related", but as distant as the east is from the west as far as "relationships" were concerned. I discovered family feuds in process; feuds that had been passed down through generations. Class distinctions had been set up. Family and longevity in the church were steadfastly observed. I pastored a church that was classified as a "family church" but had little family spirit. The women, even relatives, were not very supportive of one another. This, of course, does not mean that none of

the women supported other women, for I did observe that some of the younger women who had children without benefit of marriage were being supported by older women in their families. However, the support was so fragmented until it was difficult to determine who was really bonded with whom.

The majority of the households in the community are female-headed households. Many of the children do not have the same father and many do not know their fathers. Some of the women have children by the same father who is married to neither woman. Some of the women have live-in boyfriends. Yet, many of these women depend on social services to support their households. Most of these women are not employed outside of the home. In the seven years I have served at Mount Calvary, at least seven teenagers have had babies outside of wedlock. Some experienced multiple pregnancies; none appear to be in relationship with the fathers of their children. One can easily observe that in a church of this caliber, it is sometimes difficult for a "sweet fellowship" to exist.

As the church has grown spiritually and numerically, the make-up of the women has changed dramatically. We now have more married couples in the church which means more male and female headed households and children with the benefit of both parents living in the home. Persons with different backgrounds, socially and educationally, are entering the Mount Calvary congregation and the church

composition and family make-up has changed as well. This influx of new members who have no previous history with the East Towson community, has helped to dilute the traditional "family church" syndrome that shadowed the church for so many years. The women who have come to Mount Calvary have helped demonstrate for the "old" members that women can work together in spite of existing barriers. I have observed that when a group expands, there is less attention paid to individuals who formally may have been the main focus of the group. Adding new members who are not involved in the problem can help change the focus of former members. Love covers a multitude of sins. These new women have found a comfortable place among the original members and are working very effectively together on boards and organizations within the church.

I observed early on that although the women would support other women or families in the church and community (through the Missionary Society) with traditional food baskets and occasional monetary assistance for rent or gas and electric especially during Thanksgiving and Christmas, they had no habits of praying and fasting together or coming together to dialogue and share from the word of God. In other words, there was very little "sisterhood" or "brotherhood" in the church community. After seven years as

their pastor -- teaching, preaching and modeling a different way of living out the reality of the beloved community, and the constant influx of new members, it is not uncommon now to see women and men off in a corner after service, holding hands, praying together or for women and men to bring another person to the altar for prayer. The people of Mount Calvary have been learning new ways of ministering to others both through our worship services, bible study sessions, worship services and "Sisters Sharing" sessions. I take every opportunity possible to teach, by example, the necessity of ministering to one another. Many of Mount Calvary's men and women have regular prayer partners.

Over the past seven years, I have seen a new Mount Calvary evolve and the people of God are learning to respect, love and support one another. Prayer has opened the door to fellowship and bonding at Mount Calvary African Methodist Episcopal Church. Beyond what the AME Discipline dictates, another wind is blowing that is not common in the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Upon my arrival, I encountered a "traditional" African Methodist Episcopal Church. The people seemed to be more faithful to the denomination and it's traditions than they were to God. they followed the disciplinary procedures and worshipped like most "old line" African Methodist Episcopal Churches -- very quietly. Having served this congregation for seven years I have sensed another wind blowing; another Spirit

that is not found in the Discipline of the Church. The Mt. Calvary Church has become what traditionalists call "charismatic". That is, we do not adhere to the "AME way". Rather, we "make a joyful noise unto the Lord.

Old things are passing away; all things are becoming new.!

CHAPTER FIVE

THE METHOD

The United Theological Seminary Doctor of Ministry Project mandates that there be participation of the context associates with the candidate. These persons in the local context are referred to as context associates. The purpose of this mandate is to allow persons in the local church, Mount Calvary in this instance, the opportunity to assist the leader in the planning, development, implementation and evaluation of the project.

This project was taught by the pastor of the church who happens to be a female minister. However, the leader does not have to be a pastor or an ordained minister. My experience has shown that a male cannot effectively lead a group of African-American women in a project of this nature. Therefore, if the pastor of the church where this model is to be duplicated happens to be a male, he would do well to search his ministerial staff and congregation for a female who has a heart for God's women, and train these persons to lead the "Sisters Sharing" sessions.

The context associates were four women (ages ranging from twenty-five to seventy) who had been a part of the earlier "Sisters Sharing" group involving the young females

in the church two years prior to the formation of this model. Two are life long members of Mount Calvary and two are more recent members of the church family; one approximately fifteen years and the other only three years. Three of these women are natives of Towson and one is a native of South Carolina who now resides in Baltimore City.

The associates were apprised of the goals and objectives of the project and the time frame under which we were to work. The associates helped gather information on the history of the church and the Towson community. Together we established the most convenient meeting time, and the associates sent monthly meeting reminders, kept track of attendance and provided telephone follow-up to ensure maximum participation. They also handled the refreshments and clean following each meeting.

Although the name "Sisters Sharing" was previously used with the younger sisters, it was agreed by the context associates that the name should remain the same as it best fit our project and goals. Webster's Third New International Dictionary defines for us the word "sister" and its derivatives

> sister a female human being related to another person having the same parent; a female member of a christian church - often used with a surname or given name; a woman related or linked to another by a common tie or interest; a female human being sharing a common national or racial origin with another.

> sisterhood a community or society of sisters; the state of being a sister.[34]

I selected the title "Sisters Sharing" because of the intimacy I perceive in the word "sister." It suggests union, endearment, culture and sorority. It suggests a road map intergenerationally, for living life to life, and woman to woman; thus we are "Sisters Sharing."

Black women in the churchare naturally bonded in at least three areas

1. **Sisters by Ethnicity** - we are all connected to our motherland, Africa and have many "roots" or "traditions" as well as struggles that are common to all African American women.

2. **Sisters by Gender** - we are all female. Our gender makes us alike in multitudes of ways which bring about a commonality.

3. **Sisters in Christ** - we all have a common love for the Lord Jesus Christ.

These three elements give us enough common ground that we should be able to love one another, support one another and share our lives with one another. We do not intend to use the term loosely.

The sessions were announced through our weekly bulletins. Any woman (eighteen and above) was invited to share in this twelve month journey of learning about who we are by studying the word of God and various books by women authors that interpret the biblical passages on women. The

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[34] Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language (Unabridged) (Springfield: MA, G & C Merriam Co., 1991), 2128.

women of Mount Calvary were asked to invite family, friends and co-workers outside our context. Interested persons were to contact the designated context associate.

We agreed to meet once a month, on the first Saturday, from 8:00 a.m., until 11:00 a.m. This early morning meeting would allow the women ample time to perform their regular Saturday activities following our sessions. There were two occasions where I had preaching engagements on our scheduled meeting dates. On one occasion, a prayer luncheon for a woman's group, the women accompanied me. Other times we changed our meeting date to accommodate the leaders' schedule. The women expressed that they did not want a substitute to fill in and that where needed, we would adjust our schedule to insure the leaders' participation. In addition, while the women wanted to meet on a bi-monthly basis, the leaders' schedule would not permit. Some of the women brought their young children to the sessions. We, therefore, needed to provide entertainment for these toddlers. The children would sometimes watch "Barney" on television or the parents would bring the childrens' videos or games to proved needed entertainment.

To promote fellowship among the women, the context associates prepared a "Sisters Sharing Directory" listing names, addresses, telephone numbers, birthdates, marital status and parental status of each woman. (See Appendix B)

While the "Sisters Sharing" Directory lists twenty-

three women who were regular attendees, the women often brought other women to various "Sisters Sharing" sessions. These women are members of various churches and denominations. Twelve of the regular participants are members of Mount Calvary African Methodist Episcopal Church. Nancy Victor of New Jersey, traveled to Maryland monthly to share in these sessions with her daughter, Tracy Victor, who is a member of Mt. Calvary. During this project one sister who was searching for a new church home joined the Mount Calvary church family.

The context associates were a tremendous asset to the leader and the project. They handled the administrative details competently and with little need for assistance from the leader. They worked well together despite their differences in age and educational background. Their excitement and enthusiasm quickly spread throughout the group.

Future models are cautioned to select context associates who are both capable and cheerful. It is important that the women demonstrate a friendly attitude with all of the women entering the group. "One sour grape can spoil the bunch."

The Method

As stated in the "Introduction to the Model," our sessions took on a specific format. The following details

on the format may be helpful to future groups.

Refreshments and Fellowship

This segment had a two-fold purpose;

1. We met early, 8:00 a.m., and consequently many of the women had not had their first cup of coffee or tea before leaving home and the light refreshments were needed for both nourishment and stimulation.

2. This was the "ice breaker," getting to know you period. Especially in the beginning of our sessions, the women did not all know one another and needed opportunities, before the lesson, to get to know one another on a first name basis.

Every woman knew at least one other woman (the person who invited her) and so the tensions were eased in a very short while. I always wore very casual, comfortable clothing, mostly slacks, and encouraged the women o come dressed as comfortably as they wished. I did not wish to be seen as the "pastor," the "heavy," or the formal "church body" of the group. I wanted the women to view me as a sister who was interested in helping them learn about themselves from the word of God and other literature and how to become supporters and mentors to other women. When the women began calling me "Reverend Ann," I felt we had begun to bond, and to move toward healing so that we might become healers.

Prayer Circle

A circle represents a whole, completeness and unity. No matter how many women were in the room, at each session we formed a circle and held hands.

1. First, I welcomed everyone back to our group and praised God for keeping us safe while we were apart. Following the greeting, either I or one of the other sisters would begin to sing a familiar praise song and the others immediately joined in. (See Appendix B for praise songs used).

1. Second, I would invite the women to "place their prayer requests in the circle." (The circle was our symbol of unity). We went around the complete circle giving each woman the opportunity to share what was on her heart for prayer for herself (her unexpressed pain, her undefined pain) her family, her husband, her friends, her job concerns, her spiritual needs and especially another woman whom she knew was in need of prayer. After each individual voiced her prayer concern, we collectively placed our right foot in the circle (symbolizing our releasing the concern to God) and said together, "In the name of Jesus" to signify that we believed God with her for an answer to her prayer. After each woman had an opportunity to speak, I prayed an extemporaneous prayer on behalf of all assembled.

3. The women then took a seat (some on the floor, others on couches or chairs, always in as close a circle

format as possible). The women brought refreshments into the living room which also made them feel comfortable and at ease.

4. A review of the last session was given by a volunteer. Some women may have been absent and this helped them to catch up with where we were in the lessons. Each woman was given an outline of the lesson of the day. The leader then introduced the new lesson. We then proceeded with teaching and dialogue until our time was up.

Closing

At the close of each session, the leader gave remarks and instructions for the next session. Also, the women were given the leaders' preaching schedule so they might attend when possible. We collected $5.00 per month dues for mailings, cards and the upcoming Sisters Sharing worship service. The circle now forms again with the women holding hands. The leader or designated person would give the closing prayer. We were instructed to hug each other and give each woman a final word of encouragement.

Note As time allowed, the women were encouraged to speak out, and to voice their feelings and opinions. This was very important because all too many women have been silenced in the church, home and in the workplace. Speaking out can be both liberating and healing. Women must be given an opportunity to "come to voice." The value of this will be seen in our discussion on "where are you coming

from and where are you going" (Genesis 168). It is important for women to speak in the presence of others who are intently listening.

"Sisters Sharing" is comprised of women of African descent. I, therefore, wanted to use materials that reflect our Afrocentric descent. I chose Just A Sister Away, by Renita J. Weems, as our main textbook. This work is written by a Black woman who felt the need for Black women to have a view of women in the Bible other than the traditional Eurocentric interpretations. Dr. Weems writes in her Forward

> Dutifully, we have sat through sermons, lectures, and bible study lessons, nodding when appropriate, copiously taking notes when expected and, when called upon, obediently recapitulating what we have been told. All the while our souls have remained starved for a new revelation on the role of women in salvation history. Surely God did not mean for us to be a footnote to redemption.[35]

Dr. Weems' intention is

> "...to explore the unchartered territory of stories that could give us clues as to what biblical women felt about their lives.[36]

Just A Sister Away provided for the "Sisters Sharing" group a feminist hermeneutic with an Afrocentric tone. The Black woman's unique experience cannot be denied in the

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[35] Weems, viii.

[36] Ibid., ix.

study of the Bible.

In addition to our regular Saturday sessions, the women participated in the following worship and workshop experiences.

Fasting and Praying

The women were encouraged to practice the discipline of fasting and praying. Days were selected for the women to fast and pray collectively from 600 a.m., until 600 p.m., consuming eight glasses of water, herbal teas, and fruit juices. Most doctors recommend that everyone should drink at least eight glasses of water daily.

Foot Washing

The women, together with other female members of Mount Calvary who are not a part of "Sisters Sharing," gathered on a Friday evening for a special women's celebration worship. After a "circle prayer" was completed, the women were instructed by the leader to take the hand of another woman in the circle, and move to a comfortable spot in the sanctuary, dining room, choir loft or choir room. Instructions were given to remove shoes (and stockings, if wanted) and to kneel at the woman's feet and anoint her feet with oil (distributed by the leader). Each woman ministered to her partner by praying a special prayer and anointing her feet. Herein we learned the importance of a

servant's attitude, which in effect, was saying that no one is beneath us and there is no service I will not render for a sister (St. John 131-7).

Prayer Partners

At this same Women's Celebration Worship Service, the women were asked to exchange telephone numbers with their partners and commit to pray together by telephone for the next seven days. The leader delivered a message entitled "Sisters of the Covenant." The theme of the message was the importance of bonding among women and making "covenants" or "commitments" to self, other women and God.

Grooming The Feminine Temple

This workshop for women was held at Mount Calvary African Methodist Episcopal Church on a Saturday morning from 1000 a.m., until 12 noon. A luncheon followed. This workshop was based on Health Awareness for the christian woman. We engaged a female minister, Reverend Wanda London of Campfield African Methodist Episcopal Church, Washington, D.C., to bring a message on "Inner and Outer Beauty".

Sister Tracy Victor and Sister Marie Jews both registered nurses from the Mount Calvary Church family, distributed brochures on various health issues women face and gave lectures on the importance of regular pap smears, breast examinations and AIDS testing. Additional

information was shared on diabetes, the hazards of smoking and other health issues relating to the Black woman. A question and answer period followed the lectures.

We invited women entrepreneurs to come and display and sell their wares during the luncheon.

Consultants

The United Theological Seminary also requires the candidate to select a group of consultants to assist in the development of the project. I chose the following persons

Dr. Peggy Wall - Dr. Wall is an educator and presently serves as Administrator of the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church Christian School. Dr. Wall assists Mrs. Marlaa Hall Reid in teaching the women's bible study group at Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church. Dr. Wall conducts workshops and retreats for women and is the founder of Inside Out Consultants.

Dr. Eleanor Graham Bryant - Dr. Bryant has developed self-esteem programs for women through her doctoral studies. She is a prolific teacher of women's groups, and is the founder and pastor of Agape Fellowship African Methodist Episcopal Church.

Mrs. Marlaa Hall Reid - Mrs. Reid is the coordinator and lead teacher of the women's bible study group at Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church. She oversees the activities of over 500 women weekly. Mrs. Reid also leads

women's groups in workshops and seminars throughout the country.

Dr. Renita Weems - Dr. Weems is author of our main textbook, Just A Sister Away. She lent her expertise in African-American women's studies to this project.

Following is an outline of the sessions we shared over the twelve month period.

"Sisters Sharing" Session One

Date: Saturday, November 6, 1992

Time: 8:00 a.m.

Location: Reverend Lightner's home

Teaching Aids: The Holy Bible

Dr. Renita Weems, Just A Sister Away, Chapter I, Lura Media, San Diego,California, 1988.

T. D. Jakes, Woman Thou Art Loosed!, (Destiny Image Publishers, Shippensburg, PA., 1993)

Nell W. Mohney, Don't Put a Period Where God Put a Comma, (Dimensions for Living, South Nashville, TN., 1993)

Method: Group Dialogue

Subject: "A Mistress, A Maid, and No Mercy," (Sarah and Hagar)

Scripture Lesson: Genesis 161-16; 211-21)

Lesson Aim: The purpose of this lesson was two-fold. 1.) To demonstrate social rivalry between women of different social classes, races and ages in order to show how women exploit other women, especially where males are involved, while showing the human side of biblical women. 2.) To share personally and dialogue extensively about the question the angel asks Hagar in Genesis 168, "Hagar, maid of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?"

"Digging For The Gold"

I. Review of the Scripture Lesson

II. Exploring the Chapter

1. Give a profile of the two women in this pericope of scripture Sarah and Hagar.
2. What were the main issues raised in the scripture?
3. What were the main points raised by the author
4. What biblical truths did you personally learn from reading the scripture and the textbook?
5. How can these biblical truths be applied to your life?
6. How might Sarah, Hagar and Abraham have handled this situation in a more positive manner?
7. Who, if anyone, do you think was at fault?

III. Review of Selected Questions From "Questions for Thought" from the text book.

IV. Personal Application

1. Have you had conflict with another woman because of a love triangle? Discuss.
2. How do you relate to women who are "beneath" you socially, economically, and educationally?
3. How have you treated another woman's children (left in your care) as a result of your relationship with their father?
4. What advice would you have given Sarah? Hagar?
5. Were Sarah and Hagar enemies to each other?

Note: "Digging For The Gold" signified our purpose to go beneath the surface of the text and reveal the "hidden" meaning in the text in order to apply the lessons to our contempory situations.

Aunt Hagar's Children
"Where Are You Coming From, Where Are You Going?"

I. The Covenanting Process

1. Can you be trusted with another woman's pain?
2. The dangers of divulging information shared in confidence.
3. Vow to keep one another's trust (talk only to that woman or to God about the other woman's pain).

II. Learning to Share Our Pain

1. Voicing "undefined" pain.
2. Voicing "unexpressed" pain.
3. Releasing the pain.

III. Coming To Voice

Each woman has the opportunity to respond to the question, "Where Are You Coming From, Where Are You Going?" (See Appendix A for women's sharing.)

NOTE The "Sister's Sharing" group utilized two additional sessions with this lesson in order to allow each woman adequate time to share her past, which included the painful places in her life as well as the joyful places. It also gave each woman the opportunity to look at what she was trying to accomplish in her life.

I feel that the bonding process began at this point in the program.

"Sisters Sharing" Session Two

Date: Saturday, December 4, 1992

Time: 8:00 a.m.

Location: Reverend Lightner's home

Teaching Aids: The Holy Bible

Dr. Renita Weems, Just A Sister Away, Chapter I, Lura Media, San Diego, California, 1988.

Robin Norwood, Women Who Love Too Much, (New York, New York, Pocket Books, 1985.)

T. D. Jakes, Woman Thou Art Loosed!, (Destiny Image Publishers, Shippensburg, PA., 1993)

Evelyn Christenson, Lord, Change Me, (Wheaton, Illinois, Victor Books, 1987.)

Method: Group Dialogue and Individual Sharing

Subject: Aunt Hagar's Children
"Where Are You Coming From, Where Are You Going?"

Scripture Lesson: Genesis 161; 211-21

Lesson Aim: To encourage women to share personally and dialogue extensively about the question the angel asks Hagar in Genesis 168, "Hagar, maid of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?"

Note This session was carried over to next month in order to allow each woman an opportunity to share her story.

Aunt Hagar's Children
"Where Are You Coming From, Where Are You Going?"

I. Circle Prayer

II. Review of the Scripture Lesson

III. The Covenanting Process Reviewed

1. Can you be trusted with another woman's pain?
2. The dangers of divulging information shared in confidence.
3. Vow to keep one another's trust (talk only to that woman or to God about the other woman's pain).

IV. Learning to Share Our Pain

1. Voicing "undefined" pain.
2. Voicing "unexpressed" pain.
3. Releasing the pain.

V. Coming To Voice

Each woman has the opportunity to respond to the question, "Where Are You Coming From, Where Are You Going?"

VI. Instructions Closing Prayer Circle

"Sisters Sharing" Session Three

Date: Saturday, January 8, 1993

Time: 8:00 a.m.

Location: Sister Ursula Slade's home

Teaching Aids: The Holy Bible

Dr. Renita Weems, Just A Sister Away, Chapter I, Lura Media, San Diego, California, 1988.

Robin Norwood, Women Who Love Too Much, (New York, New York, Pocket Books, 1985.)

T. D. Jakes, Woman Thou Art Loosed!, (Destiny Image Publishers, Shippensburg, PA., 1993)

Evelyn Christenson, Lord, Change Me, (Wheaton, Illinois, Victor Books, 1987.)

Method: Group Dialogue and Individual Sharing

Subject: Aunt Hagar's Children
"Where Are You Coming From, Where Are You Going?"

Scripture Lesson: Genesis 161; 211-21

Lesson Aim: To encourage women to share personally and dialogue extensively about the question the angel asks Hagar in Genesis 168, "Hagar, maid of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?"

Note This lesson is continued from previous session in order to allow each woamn time to share her story.

Aunt Hagar's Children
"Where Are You Coming From, Where Are You Going?"

I. Circle Prayer

II. Review of the Scripture Lesson

III. The Covenanting Process Reviewed

1. Can you be trusted with another woman's pain?
2. The dangers of divulging information shared in confidence.
3. Vow to keep one another's trust (talk only to that woman or to God about the other woman's pain).

IV. Learning to Share Our Pain

1. Voicing "undefined" pain.
2. Voicing "unexpressed" pain.
3. Releasing the pain.

V. Coming To Voice

Each woman has the opportunity to respond to the question, "Where Are You Coming From, Where Are You Going?"

VI. Instructions Closing Prayer Circle

"Sisters Sharing" Session Four

Date: Saturday, February 6, 1993

Time: 8:00 a.m.

Location: Reverend Lightner's home

Teaching Aids: The Holy Bible

Dr. Renita Weems, Just A Sister Away, Chapter II, Lura Media, San Diego, California, 1988.

Robin Norwood, Women Who Love Too Much, (New York, New York, Pocket Books, 1985.)

T. D. Jakes, Woman Thou Art Loosed!, (Destiny Image Publishers, Shippensburg, PA., 1993)

Evelyn Christenson, Lord, Change Me, (Wheaton, Illinois, Victor Books, 1987.)

Jean Lush, The Emotional Phases of A Woman's Life, (Fleming H. Powell Company, Terrytown, New York, 1987.)

Method: Group Discussion and Dialogue

Subject: "Blessed Be The Tie That Binds" (Naomi and Ruth)

Scripture: The Book of Ruth

Lesson Aim: To help women understand the importance of woman to woman friendships without regard to age. To help women understand the importance of making covenants with other women to stick with each other through hard times. To view the danger of being forced to choose between male and female relationships.

"Digging For The Gold"

I. Prayer Circle

II. Review of the Scripture (Ruth 1-2)

III. Exploring The Chapter

1. Give a profile of the three women in this pericope, Naomi, Ruth and Orpah.
2. What were the main issues raised in the pericope?
3. What were the main points raised by the author?
4. What biblical truths did you personally learn from reading the pericope and the text books?
5. Was Ruth imposing her friendship upon Naomi?
6. Why did Naomi reject Ruth and Orpah?
7. Describe an event that caused you to grieve. What blessings did you receive in the midst of your grief?

IV. Review of Selected Questions From "Questions For Thought"

V. Personal Application

1. What does true friendship mean to you? Describe your best friend.
2. What does the phrase, "My Sister's Keeper" mean to you personally?
3. What kind of friend do you feel you are to other women?
4. Are you more loyal to males than to females?
5. Do you relate well to women in other age groups?
6. Have you ever been rejected by a friend or relative?
7. What did Ruth's covenant with Naomi (116) mean to you personally?
8. Would you classify yourself as Ruth, Naomi or Orpah?
9. Have you ever been forced to choose between the friendship of a man and another woman?
10. What advice would you have given Ruth, Naomi and/or Orpah?

"Sisters Sharing"
(Prayer Luncheon Participation)

March 6, 1993
11:00 a.m.

Brown Memorial Baptist Church
Baltimore, Maryland

Guest preacher was Reverend Ann Farrar Lightner. "Sisters Sharing" group accompanied the leader in lieu of our regular session. The women met and fellowshipped with women of the Brown Memorial Baptist Church.

Scripture Lesson: I Kings 51-4; **Sermon Title:** "I've Got The Power."

Text: "And the Syrians had gone out by companies, and had brought away captive out of the land of Israel a little maid; and she waited on Naaman's wife. And she said unto her mistress, would God my lord were he with the prophet that is in Samaria! For he would recover him of his leoprocy."

Thesis: Many women feel that because of their circumstances or who they are, that they are powerless to make a positive impact on the lives of other women and people in general.

Proposition: Women who may not have power or position in society or government have power to be a positive force in this world no matter what their particular circumstances. The "little maid" in this scripture lesson is proof of this.

Women have power to impact the lives of others in at least three specific ways

1. I've Got the Power to Love

   - Love my oppressor, my enemy
   - Love inspite of my personal circumstances

2. I've Got the Power to Liberate

   - My words or advice can lead another to freedom
   - Point people to Jesus, the healer and liberator

3. I've Got the Power to Lift

   - Encouragement lifts people (pouring courage into others
   - Never look down on another woman; find ways to lift her up. Someone helped you when you a lift
   - Lift as you climb

Conclusion: This "little maid" had no name. All that we know of her is given in a mere twenty words in the Bible. But because she used what she had, her knowledge of the prophet in Israel, to help someone else, lives were changed and she no doubt reaped blessings in return.

The Holy Spirit will enable you - to Love - to Liberate - to Lift.

Note: The women had opportunity to dialogue about this message in the April session which dealt with women's relationships as portrayed by Ruth and Naomi.

"Sisters Sharing" Session Five

Date: Saturday, April 6, 1993

Time: 8:00 a.m.

Location: Reverend Lightner's home

Teaching Aids: The Holy Bible

Dr. Renita Weems, Just A Sister Away, Chapter II, (Lura Media, San Diego, California, 1988)
T. D. Jakes, Woman Thou Art (Destiny Image Publishers, Shippensburg, PA., 1993)

Method: Group Discussion and Dialogue

Subject: "Blessed Be The Tie That Binds" (Naomi and Ruth)

Scripture Lesson: Ruth 3 - 4

Lesson Aim: To help women understand the complex nature of women's friendship. To demonstrate balance - Naomi is now helping Ruth while in the beginning Ruth set out to be a support to the "mourning" Naomi.

"Digging For The Goal"

I. Review of the Scripture (Ruth 3-4).

II. Exploring Chapter II

1. What changes do you observe about Naomi's character?
2. What part does "purpose" play in her transformation?
3. What specifically did she teach Ruth about a.) survival and b.) getting a husband?
4. What customs do we learn about courtship and marriage during this time? How do they differ from our customs?
5. What final joy did Ruth bring to Naomi's life?

III. Review of selected questions from end of Chapter

IV. Personal Application

1. What, if anything, did you learn about commitment?
2. Have you ever lost a woman friend because of a marriage or romantic relationship?
3. How do you handle friends who always put men before your friendship?
4. Have you ever had to be a "Ruth" and carry the load in a friendship? If yes, how did you handle the non-reciprocal friendship?
5. What advice would you give a younger woman who is desirous of marriage?

Mount Calvary African Methodist Episcopal Church
300 Eudowood Lane
Towson, Maryland

Reverend Ann Farrar Lightner, Pastor

May 7, 1993

10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

"Sisters Sharing" Workshop, Luncheon and Exhibition
"Inner and Outer Beauty"

****

Moments of Praise and Worship.....Sister Patricia McCray

Opening Prayer.....Reverend Dorothy Gross

Scripture Reading .....Sister April Burke
(I Corinthians 612-20)

Presentation of Speaker.....Reverend Ann Farrar Lightner

Presentation "Inner and Outer Beauty".....Reverend Wanda London
Associate Minister
Campfield African Methodist Episcopal Church
Washington, D.C.

Presentation of Speakers.....Reverend Ann Farrar Lightner

Presentation .....
"Taking Care of the Temple"
Sister Tracy Victor, R.N.
Sister Marie Jews, R.N.

Question and Answer Period

Luncheon and Exhibits

Benediction.....Reverend Ann Farrar Lightner

"Sisters Sharing" Session Six

Date: June 12, 1993

Time: 8:00 a.m.

Location: Reverend Lightner's home

Teaching Aids: The Holy Bible

Dr. Renita Weems, Just A Sister Away, Chapter II and III, (Lura Media, San Diego, California, 1988).

T. D. Jakes, Woman Thou Art Loosed!, (Destiny Image Publishers, Shippensburg, PA., 1993).

Evelyn Christenson, Lord, Change Me, (Wheaton, Illinois, Victor Books, 1987).

Alice Matthews, A Woman Jesus Can Teach, (Discovery House Publishers, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1991).

Method: Lecture by Reverend Lightner

Subject: "Am I My Sister's Keeper?"

Scripture Lesson: Ruth 3-4

Lesson Aim: To share with the women the importance of women bonding with other women. To teach principals of friendship and "sisterhood" necessary to sustain relationships in difficult times. To teach certain methodology of mentoring as portrayed in the Book of Ruth and in I Timothy 1.

AM I MY SISTER'S KEEPER?

Reverend Ann Farrar Lightner, Leader

References The Book of Ruth

The First Letter to Timothy

Just A Sister Away, Dr. Renita Weems

A. Exploring the meaning of friendship; a friend comes around when the whole world has deserted you.

B. If you want to have a friend, learn how to first be a friend.

C. Object of friendship is to support, be supported and build one another up. Lift as you climb.

D. Friends make sacrifices one for the other. Friends do not always have strength to give.

E. Friends make covenants.

F. Friends do not betray other's confidence.

G. Friends do not bind friends and keep them from other friendships or relationships. Do not force people to choose.

H. True friendship must pass this test

1. love in action
2. loyalty in trouble
3. liberty to be what we are

Mount Calvary African Methodist Episcopal Church
300 Eudowood Lane
Towson, Maryland

Reverend Ann Farrar Lightner, Pastor

June 18, 1993

7:30 p.m.

"Sisters Sharing"

Women's Celebration Worship Service

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Moments of Praise and Worship.....Sister Patricia McCray
Sister Ursula Slade

Call to Worship.....Sister Doris Jackson

Opening Hymn....."What A Fellowship"

Scripture Reading.....Sister Yolanda Carroll
St. John 131-17

Prayer Circle.....All Women Form Circle for Prayer

Women Ministering to Women.....Footwashing and Prayer

Women's Celebration Message.....Rev. Ann Farrar Lightner,
Pastor

"Sisters of The Covenant"

Altar Prayer.....Rev. Ann Farrar Lightner

Benediction.....Rev. Ann Farrar Lightner

"Sisters Sharing" Session Seven

Date: Saturday, September 25, 1993

Time: 8:00 a.m.

Place: Reverend Lightner's home

Teaching Aids: The Holy Bible

Dr. Renita Weems, Just A Sister Away, Chapter III, (Lura Media, San Diego, California, 1988).

Evelyn Christenson, Lord, Change Me, (Wheaton, Illinois, Victor Books, 1987).

Alice Matthews, A Woman Jesus Can Teach, (Discovery House Publishers, Grand Rapids Michigan, 1991).

Method: Group Discussion and Dialogue

Subject: "My Sister's Keeper" (Martha and Mary)

Scripture Lesson: St. Luke 10:38-42; St. John 11:1-44 & 12:1-8

Lesson Aim: To demonstrate the similarities as well as differences in women's personalities, abilities and ambitions. To help women learn to respect one another's differences and chosen vocations and lifestyles.

"Digging For The Gold"

I. Review of the Scripture Lesson

II. Exploring the Chapter

1. Give a profile of the two women in this pericope, Martha and Mary.

2. What were the main issues raised in the pericope?

3. What were the main points raised by the author?

4. What biblical truths did you personally learn from reading the scripture and the chapter?

III. Review of Selected Questions from "Questions for Thought."

IV. Personal Application

1. Have you had conflict with other women because of differences in priorities or work habits?
2. Do you and other women in your home or on your job find it difficult to work together?
3. What part does respect play in this story?
4. How do you think you would have reacted if you were in Martha's and/or Mary's place?
5. Can you remember a time you disrespected another women publicly? (See Appendix for women's responses on this chapter.)
6. Do you feel that Jesus appreciated Martha's gifts more than Mary's?
7. How do you differ from the women closest to you (mother, sister, friend, etc.)

"Sisters Sharing" Lesson Eight

Date: October 2, 1993

Time: 8:00 a.m.

Place: Reverend Lightner's home

Teaching Aids: The Holy Bible

Dr. Renita Weems, Just A Sister Away, Chapter IV, (Lura Media, San Diego, California, 1988).

T. D. Jakes, Woman Thou Art Loosed!, (Destiny Image Publishers, Shippensburg, PA., 1993).

Linda J. Hollis, Womanistcare Volume I (WIWMI Publications, Evanston, Illinois, 1992).

Method: Group Discussion and Dialogue

Subject: "A Crying Shame" (Jephthah's Daughter and the Mourning Women)

Scripture Lesson: Judges 11:1-40

Lesson Aim To demonstrate the need for "sister's sharing," "mentoring," and "bonding" between women. This lesson will actually show women bearing one another's burdens. To emphasize the healing that can come from "mourning" or "crying." Also points out abuses afflicted upon women.

"Digging For The Gold"

I. Prayer Circle

II. Review of the Scripture Lesson

III. Exploring the Chapter

1. Give a profile of the main characters in this pericope Jephthah, Jephthah's daughter and the wailing woman.
2. What were the main issues raised in this pericope?
3. What were the main points raised by the author?
4. What biblical truths did you personally learn from reading this pericope and the textbook? How can these be applied to your life?
5. How was Jephtah's daughter abused in this story?
6. Do you know any modern day Jephtah's? Explain.
7. Have you had to come to the rescue of a woman who was being physically abused?
8. What advice would you give a friend who was being a.) verbally, b.) physically abused?
9. Have you ever been involved in an abusive situation?
10. What part does self esteem play in the part of a woman living in an abusive situation?

IV. Review of Selected Questions from "Questions for Thought"

V. Personal Application

1. How do you feel about Jephthah's daughter and the other "certain women" in the Bible being left in history without benefit of a name?
2. How important are names for women in our society? Do you know the meaning of any African and African American women's names?
3. What cultural norms may have guided the decision of Jephthah's daughter to submit to her father's will?
4. Is this story about abuse or is it about insensitivity? Is there a difference? Explain.

5. How do you think you would have reacted if you were the woman in this story? How is today's woman different from biblical women in this instance?
6. What women would you ask to go away with you in a mournful situation? What characteristics would you want the women to have?

"Sisters Sharing" Lesson Nine

Date: November 13, 1993

Time: 8:00 a.m.

Location: Reverend Lightner's home

Teaching Aids: The Holy Bible

Thomas N. Hart The Art of Christian Listening, (Paulist Press, New York, Ramsey 1980).

Muriel Solomon, What Do I Say When, (Prentice Hall, New Jersey, 1988).

Ken Sande, Blessed Are The Peace Makers (Baker Book House, Grand Rapid, Michigan, 1992).

Method: Lecture By Dr. Peggy Wall

Subject: "Be Quick To Listen"

Scripture Lesson: James 1:19; Proverbs 18:13, 15:28, 2:1-2 15:23; Psalms 141:15

Lesson Aim: To teach women the importance of developing good listening skills as a tool for effective mentoring. Focus was on the elements of effective listening and the importance of love in listening.

"Be Quick To Listen...!"

I. Listening defined (What is it?) (James 1:19)

a. a communication skill that requires practice

b. a communication skill that requires understanding
c. a communication skill that requires compassion

II. Elements of Effective Listening

A. Waiting before answering (Proverbs 18:13)

1. prevents listener from jumping to premature conclusions
2. disciplines the listener not to interrupt while others are speaking
3. helps listeners to be comfortable with silence

B. Attending and Concentrating on What is Being Said (Proverbs 15:28)

1. keeps listener focused on speaker
2. strengthens eye contact
3. forces listener to eliminate distractions (i.e., t.v., music, radio, etc.)
4. encourages positive body language (i.e., leaning forward to show interest, unfolding arms, nodding, etc.)

C. Clarifying and Understanding What Has Been Communicated (Proverbs 2:1-2)

1. strengthens questioning techniques

Ex: Are you saying...?
I'm confused about...?
Can you give me an example...?

2. strengthens hearing and thinking skills

D. Reflecting, Paraphrasing and/or Summarizing In Your Own Words (Proverbs 15:23)

1. opens the door for further dialogue even in the midst of disagreement
2. ensures speaker that the listener is listening
3. diminishes the need for repetition

4. slows down the pace of emotionally high conversations

E. Agreeing - Particularly When Pointing Out Personal Errors (Psalms 14:13)

1. encourages one to listen for truth
2. minimizes the desire to blame others or focus on points of disagreement
3. controls emotions and fosters genuine humility
4. moves conversations in a more constructive direction

III. To Listen is to Love

1. listening is time consuming
2. listening can be painful
3. listening may be spiritually hazardous
4. listening is an act of love

Other Models

Since her beginning, the African Methodist Episcopal Church, along with other denominations has placed strict gender role expectations on her members. These biblical patterns of male domination, sexism and patriarchal leadership still prevail in many churches. It seems most ironic that a denomination that was birth as a result of opposition to racism and discrimination would in turn discriminate against her own -- in this case, the female. Molefi Asante, a leading authority on Afrocentricity, believes that one cannot be both sexist and Afrocentric.

In spite of the perverbal "glass ceiling" that is yet the unspoken rule in the average Black church, women are steadily progressing in areas of church leadership. In the African Methodist Episcopal Church, for example, ministers' wives have demonstrated that women can be a tremendous asset to the life and ministries of the church when allowed to move beyond the "traditional" role of pastor's wife.

More often than not, I have observed that the pastor's wife does not take an active part in the overall planning and implementing of church programs. This, varies, of course, but usually the pastor does not include his wife in these important matters of the church. There are however, exceptions, as seen by the example of the following women:

Cecelia Williams Bryant while serving with her husband, Reverend John R. Bryant, at Saint Paul and Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Churches.

Elaine McCollum Flake serving at Allen African Methodist Episcopal Church, Jamaica, New York; Reverend Floyd Flake, Pastor.

Barbara Austin Lucus serving at Bridge Street African Methodist Episcopal Church, Reverend Fred Lucas, Pastor.

JoAnn Skaggs Browning serving at Ebenezer African Methodist Episcopal Church, Fort Washington, Maryland, Reverend Grainger Browning, Pastor.

Jessica Kendall Ingram serving at Oak Grove African Methodist Episcopal Church, Detroit, Michigan, Reverend Gregory Ingram Pastor.

Marlaa Hall Reid serving at Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, Baltimore, Maryland, Reverend Frank Madison Reid, III, Pastor.

These women, and many others, have brought new life and exciting ministries to their pastor/husband's churches by developing vibrant women's ministries, most of which started with a simple weekly women's bible study group and have grown to annual women's retreats, prayer breakfasts, women's national and international conferences and a host of weekly ministries designed to meet the needs of the majority of their congregations, women, at these local churches.

It is fascinating to watch God grow women leaders in His organized churches. These women were not ordained ministers when they married their pastor/husbands. Most of them had not even heard a call from God. However, while mentoring God's women in the church, God called some of them to preach His word and these women are being used on an even higher level. They preach, teach, and assist with the overall planning of the church.

With the exception of Marlaa Hall Reid, all have accepted the call to preach and have been ordained and completed seminary. This is not to infer that all women who work in the church will necessarily be called of God to preach. Marlaa Hall Reid, speaks and teaches at churches around the country and is an excellent example of the fact that a woman does not have to be ordained in order to be an effective leader.

The fruit of these ministries speaks for itself. Two of these women, Jessica Kendall Ingram and Elaine McCollum Flake, are scholars at United Theological Seminary in the Doctorate of Ministry program. Reverends Lucas and Browning have both completed Doctorate of Ministry programs at other seminaries. Reverend Bryant is now serving as Missionary Supervisor of the Tenth Episcopal District of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, (the state of Texas) with her husband, Bishop John R. Bryant. Marlaa Hall Reid ministers to approximately 500 women weekly at Bethel

ministers to approximately 500 women weekly at Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church. Marlaa does not feel called to the ordained ministry although she acknowledges that God has called her to ministry to preach and to teach His word. Marlaa also organizes the Annual Women's Day choir consisting of some 300 voices.

The fruit of the ministries of these women, serving with their husbands, proves that women can be a tremendous asset to their husband/pastors. There is no valid need to fear that women are going to "take over" their husband's churches. Pastor's wives generally respect and support the role of their husband's as "pastor of the church". Both pastor and wife should be directed of God in order for the ministry to prosper. There is no room for competition. It is all to be done to the glory of God for kingdom building.

Yet there are some gifted and talented women, who happen to be pastor's wives, sitting on the second row, looking like "queens", who need to be taken off their pedestals and let loose in the congregation to become mentors to the women God has placed in their midst.

I write this in detail for two specific reasons (1) In hopes that some pastor will be led to allow his wife to use her gifts and talents in the church without fear that she will become "rebellious" (like Queen Vashti in Esther 1:1-12) or that she will outshine him in the church, and (2) in hopes that some preacher's wife, daughter, sister or

mother will be directed by God to break free from the "traditional" role of sitting on the second row looking like a "queen" or "first lady" or simply directing the choir or playing for the choir (which are worthwhile ministries) to be used of God "for such a time as this."

Women are hungry for ministry. And, I might insert a word of caution. If women's ministries are not developed in local churches, women will search out a church that offers what they need.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Personal Observations

The "Sisters Sharing" group has had several opportunities to mentor other women both from our group and outside the group. Their willingness to go to these other women (without my intervention) and support these women demonstrates their growth and confidence in both themselves and God. They are no longer afraid to reach out and risk being a "sister" to someone who is in pain and in need of a "sister."

Several women from within our "Sisters Sharing" group have experienced trials and tribulations during this journey and found love and support from "sisters" within the group

- a mother's son was shot to death one year after she buried another son
- two women's marriages broke up; they have both reconciled with their husbands
- one woman suffered a miscarriage
- one woman's husband is a drug abuser

Through all of these situations, the women in the group have supported the woman in pain and helped her through the dark night of the soul. I witnessed bonding

taking place among the women. They began to care sincerely about what was happening in the lives of other women in the group. This was exhibited in our prayer circle when prayers were lifted. The women earnestly prayed one for the other.

Trust was built. During the sessions where we shared our personal experiences, "Where Are you Coming From, Where Are you Going?," the women took a vow to keep one another's confidence and not share another's story outside of the group except with God in prayer. I have to date had no reports of broken trust. No woman has left the group because of another woman's insensitivity.

Several members of the group were new members at Mount Calvary when we started the sessions. Their participation in the "Sisters Sharing" sessions accelerated their acceptance by other women in the church. They were benefitted by having the opportunity to get to know several members of the congregation on a personal level during the early stages of their involvement with the church. I have seen members join and for years not have any personal interaction with other members of the congregation.

However, the members of "Sisters Sharing" have become a part of the full life of the church and are serving in other capacities such as the usher board, choirs and Sunday School. Most attend our weekly bible study. I might add that these women are also tithers.

Leadership Skills Demonstrated

In the beginning of the "Sisters Sharing" sessions, the women were not willing to meet and work through the lessons without the leader's presence. However, toward the end of our sessions, the women had divided themselves into teams and were meeting at their own homes preparing for the upcoming lessons. This, for me, is an indication of the growth of the women and that they have successfully bonded in love and fellowship and feel comfortable exploring the word of God without an "expert" present. Note that the leader did not mandate these private group sessions.

The women are planning a worship celebration for the participants of "Sisters Sharing," their families and friends for February 1994. Each woman will receive a certificate from the leader in commeration of this year long journey. The women will plan and carry out every aspect of the service without the leader directing them. This would not have happened one year ago!

I stated earlier in the "Why The Model Was Developed" section that during my early "Sisters Sharing" session with the young females of the church, the adult females participated in order that they might be a part of the sessions and did not demonstrate very much leadership ability in terms of "program development" or "mentoring" the younger women. Based on the women's performance in these "Sisters Sharing" sessions and watching them in other roles

in the church, I feel that many of them are now ready to take on the responsibility of designing and implementing a program for our younger sisters. Of course, I would supervise the effort, but I feel confident that the group is now ready for the task.

Walk A Mile In My Shoes

The women have, by their own testimonies, gained a new level of respect for other women as a result of our journey together. The women have learned to listen and hear beyond what another woman is able to articulate. Compassion is demonstrated in the group. The women have become more accepting of other women's faults and differences. The bible study lessons we focused on helped them to see the value of putting ourselves in another woman's place before judging or condemning her.

Greater Self-Confidence

Women in the "Sisters Sharing" group are beginning to realize the gifts and talents they hold in their bosom and are anxious to develop and use them for God's glory. Tracy is a Registered Nurse and is preparing to enroll in medical school; Yolonda, Karen and Ornita have enrolled in local colleges and are working toward undergraduate degrees. Rosemary is anticipating enrollment at a local university to pursue a Master's Degree.

Obstacles

Space was a slight problem. The group met at my home primarily for purposes of intimacy and comfort, but also because there was no available space at the church.

Because of our time constraints, we were often not able to complete much of the material on our outlines. It would be advantageous to have longer sessions in order for more of the material to be covered.

Child care was also a concern. Many of the women had to bring young children with them to the sessions which meant that often they could not give their undivided attention to the lessons and dialogue.

We will need to secure a sitter to relieve the mothers during the sessions. However, the fact that the women pressed their way, even in the dead of winter, to these early morning sessions demonstrated their need for "Sisters Sharing."

Where Do We Go From Here?

Word of this project has spread throughout Baltimore and vicinity. One of the reasons for the news spreading is that wherever I have been called upon to deliver messages, I lift up the results of this ministry. Another reason is that the women themselves are excited and are talking about it in their circles.

As a result of the positive impact it has had on Mount

Calvary's women and other women involved in the project, both pastors and laypersons have requested that I share the findings of this project. I have also had several requests to serve as a consultant and develop similar programs for other pastors. One such request came from a female minister from a Baptist church in New Jersey. She came to observe one of our sessions and following her visit, requested that I come to New Jersey and train leaders to start a similar program for the women. Beyond the effect that this project has had on women, the men of Mount Calvary have requested that I set up a "Brothers Sharing" program. The planning is already underway.

This first segment of "Sisters Sharing" is near completion. The group decided that it would be detrimental for this initial group to try to integrate with a new group of women since they have already bonded. I have a list of new women who want to become a part of "Sisters Sharing". (After a six month period of time had gone by, we stopped enrollment in the first session). This new group will, no doubt, be larger and will meet on a bi-monthly basis rather than monthly. The difference will be that this leader will not assume the sole responsibility of leading and hosting the group sessions. The women from the initial "Sisters Sharing" group will assist. The women who have been mentored and taught to mentor will now be available to mentor other women.

The women's answering of the questions derived from the lessons demonstrated their growth and development as christians and as women who are willing and better prepared to be mentors to other women.

Their answers and observations bespeak change and growth. They demonstrated their ability to "dig for the gold" -- diligently search the scriptures and apply them to their lives as African American women -- outside the presence of the leader. The responses also demonstrate these womens' desire and ability to become mentors. Further, the members of "Sisters Sharing" have agreed to organize the younger females at Mt. Calvary (ages 12-17) and design a program to mentor our younger sisters.

In order to both summarize our discussions and access the women's level of understanding of the materials covered, the leader designed review questions for the women to answer. Following is a sample of the summary questions from the "EXIT INTERVIEW". The women divided themselves into teams and answered the questions collectively.

A <u>verbatim</u> summary of these discussions follows the sample questions.

Women's Group Summary of "Just A Sister Away"

Chapters 1, 2, 3 and 4

A. Review of Chapter

- What were the main issues raised in the group's discussions?
- What main points was the author trying to get across?
- What were the pertinent points of the group discussion?
- What did you personally learn from the lesson?
- Will these lessons change or shape your relationships with other women? If yes, can you describe and give examples?

B. What Conclusions were drawn by

1. Dr. Renita Weems?
2. The "Sisters Sharing" group?
3. You?

"Just A Sister Away"

Summary of Chapter One

"A Mistress, A Maid, and No Mercy"
(Hagar and Sarah)

Team One

A. Main Issues Raised In Group Discussions:

- Jealousy, ethnic prejudice and not submitting to God's will. A woman's personal worth and value must be considered.

Main points author trying to get across:

- Showing how women hurt each other
- Sisterhood often goes out of the window when it involves a man
- Self-esteem should not be determined by class or by another person's perception of a woman

Pertinent points of discussion group

- Pain and our reaction to pain
- Determining our focus
- Co-dependency

What we personally learned from the lesson?

Nancy It caused me to reflect on how much Sarah and Hagar I have in me, and to question if Abraham lives at my house.

Nancy I focused on myself, and am attempting to re-direct my life. I would like to follow a path that is socially and spiritually positive.

Yolonda I learned that I had not grown so much as I thought. It was time to re-direct my life. I could no longer stay complacent. I can't continue to accept complacency as a way of life.

Will these lessons change or shape your relationships with other women?

Norma Yes it will. I have become a better witness and mentor.

Nancy Yes it did. It has given me the strength to help women without regard to their reactions.

Yolonda The lessons have changed my life. I have become softer and more compassionate in my dealings with other women.

B. Conclusions:

1. Given the opportunity we don't always help each other. As women, we should have more compassion for each other. We need to move beyond jealousy and reach out to one another.

2. The group was in agreement with Dr. Weems. We also decided to become more supportive of other women.

3. **Nancy** I love my sisters. I can identify with my sisters. I want to put that love and identity into action.

   Yolonda It is a joy to be a woman. Together, we can make each other stronger.

   Norma It is wonderful to have a support group of other women. Also, to be a support to other women.

"Just A Sister Away"

Summary of Chapter Two

"Blessed Be The Tie That Binds"

Ruth and Naomi

Team Two

A. Main Issues Raised in Group Discussion:

- Naomi's bitterness
- Ruth's commitment to Naomi
- Ruth's love for Naomi
- Death of Naomi's family
- Friendship between Ruth and Naomi
- Naomi is destitute

Main points author trying to get across:

- The true meaning of family; not just husband and children. Includes all who live together and love and take care of each other.
- The true meaning of commitment; which means to have an emotional obligation to someone.
- The true meaning of friendship; which is to be loyal, understanding, and be nonjudgemental
- The true meaning of love; which is the unselfish, loyal and benevolent concern for the good of another.

Pertinent points of discussion group

- Ruth's commitment to Naomi; her desire to take care of Naomi.
- Women being friends, opening up to one another, showing pain, and being a mentor to one another.

What we personally learned from the lesson

(Group did not submit answers)

Will these lessons change or shape your relationships with other women? If yes, can you give one or two examples?

Shawnise Yes, I will be more cautious about who claims to be my friend. I will not be a friend to

someone who really doesn't care about me, just so I will have a friend. I will be open enough to let a new friend in.

Sharon No, because I have always empathized with other women.

Pat Yes, it has given me a new definition of friendship. Before I would look for friends just to be in the "in crowd." I know the true meaning of friendship is to be myself.

B. Conclusions

1. Conclusions drawn by Dr. Weems

2. The good fortune of one woman is not the misfortune of another. Naomi showed Ruth what to do to get a husband, and Ruth's good fortune to remarry did not cause her to be selfish and forget about Naomi's needs. Naomi needed love, family and friendship in her life.

3. Ruth was intentional to preserve her friendship with Naomi. Ruth did not want their friendship to die just because their husbands were dead.

1. Conclusions drawn by the "Sisters Sharing" group

2. Women need to learn how to be friends, how to open up to one another, how to listen and not judge one another, how to show pain, and how to mentor to one another.

1. Conclusions drawn by me

Sharon Women should be more understanding and willing to come to the aid of other women.

Shawnise To look deep inside myself and realize who my true friends are.

Pat To be unselfish enough to sacrifice what I think would be the good life in order to get someone else started. Ruth was sympathetic enough to help Naomi find a reason for living instead of deserting her.

"Just A Sister Away"

Summary of Chapter Three

"My Sister's Keeper"

(Martha and Mary)

Team Three

A. Main Issues Raised In Group Discussion:

- All women are different, however, women must still respect other women when their ways may not be the same as ours
- Some women take other women for granted, especially when women have different talents - women assume the other person will always perform their special "talent."
- Women must accept other women for what they are and accept their positions in life. For example, their beliefs and habits and remember no one is perfect; everyone makes mistakes.
- Women are more critical of a sister, more so, than a man. A woman will quickly judge another sister, however, a man will be excused for one reason or another.
- You must be there for a woman even when her problems are continuous. For example, when a woman continues to remain in an unhappy and abusive relationship, knowing there is a better way for her, you must let her know you are there for her. And, that doesn't mean you have to be totally involved in the problem; just be a good listener.
- Women are more tolerant of other women who are close to them (mothers, daughters, sisters and nieces) and they must learn to do the same for others.
- Every job is important -- especially when it's for the Lord.
- Women make too many assumptions before they actually talk to people. Some women appear to be different from the way they really are -- you have to talk to them to find out.
- Young women need strong role models to help them in this world.

B. Conclusions:

April: Accepting women for who they are isvery important. Women sometimes put too many demands and expectations on other women. Also,our values and morals are completely out of place. Women are now too concerned with their hair,nails, clothes and being sexually active more than their health, education, and just being their own selves. Women need to be reminded that no matter what their situation may be they are special, and that they can make a difference in the world.

Will these lessons change or shape your relationship with other women. If yes, can you describe or give one or two examples.

Ursula: Yes, the lesson of Martha and Mary will change my relationship with other women. I have a habit of expecting a lot out of my women friends. I get upset easily when they do not live up to my expectations. I must learn to accept and not try to change them.

Example When I try to encourage a friend of mine that she could make it without being in a dead-end relationship, she continues to complain to me but won't do anything to try to change. I must continue to be there for her and not avoid her.

Each of us is blessed with certain gifts. These gifts must be used and nourished. We must love each sister even when they're not at our level of growth.

Keionna: Yes. I will no longer take other women or their positions for granted. Each job is important, but I would rather sit and learn. I am not the type to be in a leadership position. I like for things to be in place, but I have grown accustomed to having others take care of the details, i.e., my mother.

"Just A Sister Away"

Summary of Chapter Four

"A Crying Shame"

(Jephthah's Daughter)

Team Four

A. Main Issues Raised By The Group:

- How men use and abuse women for their own purposes, their glory, power. Women end up suffering for men
- How low self-esteem affects men
- Women sympathized with other women (weeping)
- Different responses today's women might have

Main points from the author

- Women need to stick together and support one another during their valley periods
- We need to weep for one another .
- Women should know available resources for women in crises

Pertinent points of discussion group

- Women need to weep more for other women and support them. We need to teach women that they are"too good" to be mistreated and abused by men
- Also, women should give loving advice to other women
- Teach women the value of self-worth

What was personally learned from the lesson?

We all agreed that we need to be more responsive to other women and take time to listen to them, as well as weep more for them and in some cases, begin to weep for them.

SISTERS SHARING
MT. CALVARY AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH
EXIT INTERVIEW

1. Will these sessions change or shape your relationships with other women? Explain.

2. Do you feel better equipped to counsel/mentor another woman? Explain.

3. Have you begun putting your mentoring skills into practice? Explain.

4. Do you feel any differently about yourself as a "sister" having participated in "Sisters Sharing"? Explain.

5. Do you think every local church should have a group similar to "Sisters Sharing"? Explain.

6. If another "Sisters Sharing" group was formed, would you feel comfortable being a leader of the group? Explain.

Note: The women's verbatum response to the above questions follow.

SISTERS SHARING
MT. CALVARY AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH
EXIT INTERVIEW

Patricia [redacted]

1. A change in my attitude toward the pain of other women will surely be changed. I believe that I will be better able to show more compassion than before, and better able to listen to their concern without giving my opinion. I will be more encouraging, where before I was a bit sanctimonious in my actions.

2. How do we know when we have enough equipment? Yes, I do feel better equipped in the sense that, my listening skills have become attuned to what is being said by actions instead of words. Not saying that I will become a professional counselor, but I would strive to become a professional confidante.

3. Not yet, but I am open for the opportunity.

4. Any time that I am involved in a bible study/fellowship/retreat scenario geared toward the spiritual maturing of women, I always come away not only feeling differently, but looking differently at

what I consider tragic or no way out situations. I then consider myself blessed to be granted the opportunity to share with other women, which gives way to healing. When we share the valley experiences that we have had in our lives, and then experience deliverance, I then am reassured that God is able.

5. Yes. There can never be enough of fellowships which are specifically concentrated on self esteem building, active bible study groups, and the opportunity to interact with other women. We as women know that we all are pressing through trial and tribulation. We often times feel as though we are the only ones going through the valley, but when we fellowship with other women and learn that they too have suffered and are going through a healing process, we then learn to appreciate our valley experience, and allow God to heal us.

6. Yes. With the training that has occurred in this group and the opportunity to learn what areas need addressing, being comfortable is not a commodity but a necessity. So when do we begin?

SISTERS SHARING

MT. CALVARY AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

EXIT INTERVIEW

Shawnise [redacted]

1. Yes, these sessions will and have helped to shape my relationships with other women. I have learned that I do not have to beg any woman to be my friend. I also learned that if a woman does not want to be my friend, it doesn't mean there is something wrong with me. I have friends in the Sisters Sharing group that I can count on for support. I feel good about being involved in the Sisters Sharing group.

2. Yes. I feel better equipped to council/mentor other women. I do feel that I need more training.

3. Yes. There are two women in particular that I listen to and try to recommend solutions regarding their personal and job related problems.

4. Yes. I feel more willing to share my pains, and to thank God for everything He has done for me.

5. Yes. Women need other women. Women need to know that

other women share their pain and that they are not alone.

6. Yes. I would feel comfortable being a leader of the group.

SISTERS SHARING

MT. CALVARY AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

EXIT INTERVIEW

Sharon [redacted]

1. Yes. I will be more tolerant and understanding of other women.

2. Yes. I feel that I can bring new insight to them.

3. Yes. I have been trying to help young women understand that they do not have to lower their personal standards in order to get a man. I try to demonstrate for them, by personal example, men respect women who respect themselves.

4.Yes. I feel more comfortable about my womanhood and about being an African American woman who can contribute something to other sisters.

5. Yes. Women need to be more supportive of each other and Sisters Sharing" will show them how.

6. I would feel comfortable leading and sharing what I have learned with other sisters. While sharing, I am sure I will grow as well.

SISTERS SHARING

MT. CALVARY AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

EXIT INTERVIEW

April [redacted]

1. Yes. These sessions have helped my relationships with other women. I now know how to be a sister/friend to other women. I now feel more comfortable sharing my own feelings with other women.

2. Yes. To a certain degree I feel better equipped to council and mentor other women. I feel I still need to learn how to "listen" to other women without interrupting them to tell my own story.

3. At the present time, I have not put my mentoring skills to use -- at least not formally.

4. Yes. I do feel differently about myself after participating in "Sisters Sharing". I now feel it's o.k. for me to share with other women. Also, I now know how to be friends with other women.

5. Yes. Every local church should have a "Sisters Sharing" group. women need to learn how to share with other women and to just be there for each other.

6. I am not sure if I would feel comfortable about being a "leader" for a new group. Perhaps with someone helping me I could do the job. I need to develop more leadership skills.

SISTERS SHARING

MT. CALVARY AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

EXIT INTERVIEW

Ursula [redacted]

1. These sessions have changed my relationships with other women because I am better able to sympathize with women going through crises. These sessions have shaped my relationships with other women because I can accept them as they are and not expect more out of them than they are willing to give.

2. I feel better equipped to mentor other women because I have grown spiritually. Before I give any advice, I always pray and seek God's direction. This was not true of me before "Sisters Sharing".

3. I have begun to put my mentoring skills into practice on my job. I supervise 13 women from different walks of life. I use what I have learned in "Sisters Sharing" to give direction to these women.

4. Because of my participation in "Sisters Sharing", I am able to "give more of myself" when another sister is in need. In this "Sisters Sharing" group I am able to show my weaker side and not be criticized.

5. Every church should have a group similar to "Sisters Sharing" because there is a need for women to get together, share, and not feel as though they have to be alone.

6. I would not feel comfortable being a sole leader of a "Sisters Sharing" group at this time. When my listening skills have improved, I will feel more equipped.

SISTERS SHARING

MT. CALVARY AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

EXIT INTERVIEW

Tracy [redacted]

1. Yes. Sisters Sharing has made me realize what the word sister really stands for -- trust, understanding, love, listening, and just being real with one another. These sessions have enabled me to go into female relationships with the above qualities, and be a true sister.

2. Yes. I feel that I have better listening skills. I also know who I am and am not ashamed about where I came from, which will allow me to be a more effective mentor.

3. Yes. I deal with women on a daily basis at work. I have the opportunity to share with sisters, to listen to sisters, and at times pray with sisters. I encourage the young ladies to begin finding a positive insight about their lives and looking up.

4. Being my mother's only daughter, I have found myself with the best sisters God could give anyone. I feel comfortable saying what's on my mind, not having to worry about what others think or how it will sound. I feel secure in my sisters.

5. Yes. If God's women would learn to be "real sisters" to one another, the body of Christ will grow stronger in numbers and faith.

6. Not at this time. I am being taught and do not feel completely comfortable leading, but I do feel I have leadership skills and one day I do plan on leading a "Sisters Sharing" group. If it be the will of God.

SISTERS SHARING

MT. CALVARY AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

EXIT INTERVIEW

Rosemary [redacted]

1. The sessions have enabled me to become more sensitive to another woman's stories. We can sometimes overlook the needs of our sisters due to our being focused on our own needs. As a result of "Sisters Sharing", I have grown as a woman and would like to challenge other women to grow.

2. I feel be better equipped to counsel women who are of the faith because "Sisters Sharing" was comprised of christian women. As christians, we share a bond and a commonality unlike groups comprised of women who are not christian. As a christian woman. I feel it was easier to share with my sisters some of the struggles that are unique to christian women. Through the scriptural references and experiences shared, I feel I am equipped to counsel and/or mentor other women.

3. I have begun to discuss issues that I once felt uncomfortable discussing with another woman. Through mentoring we must be able to disclose our experiences and share of ourselves.

4. After participating in "Sisters Sharing", I feel that I am unique and special as a woman. I feel that my story is important. This group has reinforced and validated my exquisiteness as a woman.

5. Yes. I think every local church should have a group similar to "Sisters Sharing". There are things that women need to share with other women. Through these groups we can express these issues in a "safe" environment.

6. If another "Sisters Sharing" group were formed I would feel comfortable being a leader because we have build a foundation of trust and openness.

SISTERS SHARING

MT. CALVARY AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

EXIT INTERVIEW

Keionna [redacted]

1. Yes. It taught me to be a better listner and friend.

2. Yes. I am in the process of developing my listening skills. This will enable me to mentor other women.

3. I'm tying to. When someone calls to tell me about a problem they are having or ask for advice, I try not to interrupt and talk about my problems. I am more sensitive now.

4. Yes. I have learned the real defition of what a sister is. I have women that I thought were my true, but found out that they were not. But I have some true friends that I took for granted.

5. Yes. Women need to be closer in order to help one another.

6. Not right now, I have still in the process of developing my listening skills which I feel are important to be good leader.

SISTERS SHARING

MT. CALVARY AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

EXIT INTERVIEW

Myrtice [redacted]

1. Yes. It allows me to be able to express myself with other women, and it allows me to be able to understand how they feel.

2. Yes. To mentor because I can do that with the parents on my job because I can share them things I have experienced and how my experiences can help them. Most of my parents are younger.

3. Yes. On my job with parent conferences and younger family members.

4. Yes. Before I wouldn't talk to people and now can I talk about my problems with women I trust.

5. Yes. I think every local church should encourage the young and older women to participate in things together.

6. It would depend on the group. If the group was made up of women I know, I would feel more comfortable. Otherwise, I wouldn't feel comfortable.

SISTERS SHARING

MT. CALVARY AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

EXIT INTERVIEW

Yolanda [redacted]

1. Yes. It made more sensitive to other women's needs.

2. Yes. I understand women better, therefore I can counsel them.

3. Yes. I listen better and I'm less judgemental.

4. Yes. I see myself in a positive light. I think of myself more in terms of what I can do as opposed to what I can't.

5. Definitely. Women need an area where they can openly discuss their emotions.

6. No. I feel I'd be more valuable as a helper.

SISTERS SHARING

MT. CALVARY AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

EXIT INTERVIEW

Norma [redacted]

1. Yes. It gives me an opportunity to appreciate and understand where other women are coming from.

2. The few sessions I attended were very helpful, because I missed some I don't feel equipped to counsel other women.

3. Kind of. I always try to help others.

4. No.

5. Yes. Everybody needs someone else. It's nice to have a support group.

6. Yes. I have a lot to offer.

Are Black Churches Ready for Female Mentoring Programs?

In the case of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, over two hundred years have passed, and the church has not yet fully recognized the particular needs of its majority population, women. In most congregations in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, programs have not been developed to enhance the life of women and to prepare them to move into the full life of the church through positions of leadership and authority.

The traditional functions of the Missionary Society of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, queen's contests, teas and fashion shows are not fulfilling the deep seated needs of the women of African Methodism. While this organization certainly has its place in the Church, it is not designed to fulfill the need women have to be mentored by other African American christian women. It is imperative, therefore, that women define their own needs and implement programs that will train and prepare them to meet the needs of the larger part of the congregation - women! Our women must be given the opportunity to "come to voice."

Women have been crying unto the Lord for help, for guidance, and for affirmation in the body of Christ. All too often women have been made to feel like second class citizens in the body of Christ. Although most churches would not be able to survive spiritually, programmatically

or financially without its women, women are not accepted as capable leaders in all most of our African American churches.

In all too many churches the female is not welcome in the pulpit. Nor is she asked to serve as deacon,trustee, steward or other major offices in the church. She is expected to follow and not lead; to listen and not speak; to respond when her male pastor preaches and contribute when the offering plate is passed. She is to cook and serve meals in the church, cover her head and sit in the pew and listen uncritically to her male leader who is, in many instances, less educated than she is.

Dr. W. Franklin Richardson, Secretary of the National Baptist Convention, United States of America, Inc., talked about church women's dilemma in the "Detroit News".

> Women are the backbone of the church. They have been willing to do the things men haven't wanted to do, yet they haven't received the credit they deserve...we are just now beginning to understand that sexism is the same (as racism). It doesn't make any sense to train these women as theologians and ministers and not give them a position.

God has responded to the cry of his women by equipping pastors, both male and female, with the ability to develop programs and ministries that will edify women and equip them to be the "help meet" God fashioned her to be -- in the home, church, community and the world.

Exodus 2:23-35 states

> And it came to pass in the process of time, that the King of Egypt died, and the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried and their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage. And God heard groanings, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God had respect unto them.

Just as God heard the Israelites cry, God has heard our cry!

The Bible was our foundation for this Women's Ministry Program. Therefore we examined scripture as a basis for this undertaking. We soon found that there is "nothing new under the sun." We found our own situations, our own dilemmas, our own pain and joys, and our own story in the lives of biblical women. We found our identity in the stories of Hagar and Sarah, Ruth and Naomi, Vashti and Esther, Rebecca and Leah, Rahab and Bathsheba, Jephthah's daughter, Mary and Martha, the woman at the well, and countless other "certain women". More importantly, we discovered through the word of God how to handle the situations we face today as we strive to be God's women mentoring other women.

I believe this exercise has provided solid biblical teachings and supportive relationships for women facing the challenge of Godly living in an ungodly world. A church without a women's ministry is an incomplete church. A "Sisters Sharing" ministry will help fill that void. Much prayer and planning must take place in order for "Sisters

Sharing" ministries to become a reality in every local church. Women as well as men must allow the barriers to come down. We must be willing to "rethink" the word of God.

Vicki Kraft writes

> There is a distinct difference between tradition and biblical truth. While the Bible is divine and infallible, tradition is human and fallible. Women and men must learn the difference. Discerning the impact of culture and tradition on the understanding of truth is important in planning how to implement this essential ministry to women.

Women must be carefully and purposefully taught what the word of God says about who we are as a part of the body of Christ. Then and only then will women be able to distinguish cultural teachings from sound theological teachings, and become liberated as a unique part of God's kingdom building agenda.

Women are ready for female mentoring programs. It's time for the church to get ready.

Personal Growth Observations

This project has both challenged and motivated me as a pastor and particularly as a pastor who happens to be female. It has forced me to closely examine the needs of women both in my congregation and from other denominations; and face the fact that the women in our churches are crying out for help.

The women are thirsty for opportunities to dialogue both about biblical stories and their personal lives. The women are silently crying out to be recognized as an intricate part of the body of Christ. They realize that they are more than a "footnote in redemption history." They want to take their rightful place not only in the pews, but also in places of leadership.

While four of the women in our "Sisters Sharing" group were aspiring for the preaching ministry, (one preached her initial sermon New Year's Eve; one was already preaching and two have not yet preached initial sermons), the majority of the women simply want to serve, to use the gifts and talents they have recognized in their lives to serve the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The project challenged me to listen, I mean really listen to the women's stories -- stories of pain that comes from rejection, abuse, molestation, loss, depression, divorce, death of a loved one, sickness and loneliness. And as I listened to their stories, I was challenged to do all I could to provide opportunities for healing.

The challenge these women presented -- they looked to me as an agent of God for answers -- motivated me to work steadfastly with not only this "Sisters Sharing" group, but to help develop groups like ours in any church that would open its doors to the ministry.

We journeyed together for a year -- twelve months we

were relating, bonding, sharing, trusting, depending and looking to one another for support and encouragement. These twelve months proved to be a turning point in the lives of the women who participated. It is very difficult to measure internal changes except to watch for outward behavioral changes. Even though the leader could listen and hear testimonies of "a brand new me," one cannot adequately transfer those feelings, expressions, tears and smiles onto paper.

Even the writings of the women about their understanding of the lessons we covered and their new found understanding of what it means to be a sister and mentor, and to support other women, does not fully express the changes and growth I witnessed having journeyed with these women for the past twelve months. If only hearts could truly be heard.

This project leaves me determined to be a more sensitive pastor. A pastor who will be careful to look beyond the exteriors of the women and the men who sit and listen to me every Sunday morning. I will strive to look past the exterior and seek ways to get to know the people on a heart level; to see where they hurt and what truly brings them joy. The women have forced me to this new level of ministry and I am grateful to God for each of them. I see them as disciples who will now go and make disciples. They will inevitably share what they have experienced and they will make a difference in the congregations and communities

where they serve.

I thank God for the Dayton experience. United Theological Seminary has opened the doors for a new chapter in ministry for me. This project has not been solely out of "duty" to earn a degree. This project has been a joy! I am indebted to my mentors, Dr. Jeremiah A. Wright and Dr. Jawanza Kunjufu for the privilege of participating in the "Afrocentric Preaching And Pastoring", and for their support and encouragement during the development and implementation of the "Sisters Sharing" project. The entire experience at United Theological Seminary is one I shall cherish always. Long live the United Theological Doctor of Ministry Program!

APPENDIX

APPENDIX A

"WHERE AM I COMING FROM AND WHERE AM I GOING"

SISTERS SHARING GROUP'S SELF DESCRIPTION

Yolonda [redacted]

July 28, 1993

WHERE AM I COMING FROM AND WHERE AM I GOING?

I come from New York City. A city filled with anything you want, anytime you want it. I am a daughter of a numbers running father and a welfare mom. My parents are not nor ever were in a positive loving relationship. I am, simply put, the result of a purely physical relationship. Dad's influence in my life has been nil. Mom is the one who made sure I did the right thing.

My life had been one of physical and spiritual poverty. We lived in a mice and drug infested building. The neighborhood was designed to keep you down. Living in a neighborhood filled with so much negative energy, it is very hard to maintain a positive attitude. It is easy to think of yourself as a failure. My mother did not get out of the neighborhood. However, she made sure I did. She made sure I knew there was life outside of Crown Heights. What she didn't give to herself. She gave to me.

Now the question is where am I going? Fear is a strong opponent. I have come a good way from the corners of St. Johns and Classon. I no longer have to live with mice and drugs. I don't have to live with abusive men. So why have I stalled my own progress? Fear. Fear that tells me you ain't nothing but that ghetto girl. Fear that tells me I can't achieve my goals.

Back to the original question, where am I going? I am going up. I am going to destroy that fear demon. Where I'm going is not so much a place as a mind set. I am going to achieve positive thinking for me. I am going towards excellence for me. I am going to love myself. I am going to be the person God wants me to be.

Ursula [redacted]

July 1993

WHERE AM I COMING FROM AND WHERE AM I GOING

I was an only child but I was raised in the same household with my mother, my natural grandparents and my five cousins.

My parents were divorced when I was very young. I only remember my father visiting me on holidays. As I got older I remember receiving the child support checks from my father and using them on anything I wanted.

I never knew what it was to have a dominant male figure in my life when I was young. My grandfather and great-grandfather spoiled me rotten.

I had a happy childhood and was taught "the sky is the limit."

When I finished high school, I won a scholarship. All I could think was, that I was in love and wanted to get married. I found out later that my mother was upset because I didn't go to college and become a teacher like her.

I got married young and had a baby. My first husband and I were from different worlds. He believed a woman's place was in the home. I was very independent and wanted to do things when I wanted to. When my daughter was two years old, I announced to my family that I was going to look for a job. Oh, how everyone laughed at

me. This gave me more determination.

I found that job after 3 weeks. Maybe this was my downfall. I began going out a lot with the girls. My first husband was a good provider and dedicated to his job, not giving me any time to be with him.

We separated. I went back to live with my grandmother. I dated many men. I had a tendency to date weak men. These men always gave me my way.

My first husband and I went to counseling. He wanted to try again. My mind was already made up not to try. I finally filed for divorce. My daughter and I moved to our own apartment.

I got tired of the dating scene and rededicated my life to Christ. I became totally involved in my family and church. I worked and spent time with the family. Others may call it dull but I felt I was satisfied.

One evening while out celebrating my girlfriend's birthday, I met someone new. We talked and dated on and off for many years. This man was different than any I had been involved with before. He was strong, dominant, and had some of the same ideals I had. We bought a home together and later married (very backwards, but this is how it happened).

Was I always lacking this type of male presence in my life? I often wonder.

Also after about 30 years my father and I have renewed our relationship. He has asked for my forgiveness for not being there when I was growing up.

I came from being a spoiled brat to becoming a woman that puts God first in everything and appreciates his blessings.

I'm striving to be a woman that will make a difference in the lives of some of the people I come into contact with daily. I'm striving to be the kind of wife that shows love and patience to a man that knew me when and to let him know it was nothing but the Grace of God that made me who I am today. I'm striving to be the kind of parent that my child knows she can count on. I'm striving to be the kind of mother-in-law that not only talks forgiveness and understanding but shows it. I'm striving to be the kind of grandmother that will not spoil her grandchildren to the point that others can't stand to be around them and they will become brats like I was. I'm striving to be the kind of daughter that will make my parents proud.

WHERE AM I COMING FROM, WHERE AM I GOING?

Patricia [redacted]

September, 1993

Out of my mother's womb came I, naked and a creature ready for God's plan....at least that is what I would like to think.

Attending church was and still is second nature to me. As a child my grandmother, my Ma as I called her, made sure that Sunday always included, first Sunday School and then worship services, no matter how long they were. I attended first out of obedience to grandmother, who looked so pleased when I was out of my grungy jeans and in a clean crisp dress with patent leather shoes shinning, hair held in place with a million (only an exaggeration) barrettes, and even smelling like a girl. I loved Sunday School, because that's where I first met Him. Oh He took my heart at our first encounter. He knew exactly what to say to convince me that I was His and He was mine. That is where I first met my love, Jesus. As I matured physically, my spiritual growth dwindled. I became distracted with earthly pleasures and the opposite sex. No longer did I view my spiritual growth as the basic foundation for my overall maturity. I treated life as an entertainment and fun, fun, fun was all that was on my mind.

Early in my life I had a dream of becoming a school teacher. As I

progressed in my physical and mental existence, my aspirations changed. At one point I had forgotten my early objective and embarked upon a journey that has continued, even unto this day.

I messed up... If I would put every relationship in a hat, school the hat up and pulled out one at random, it would read the same.... I messed up. If I were to put every conscious effort that I have attempted in a hat, shook that hat up and pulled one out at random, it would read the same... I messed up!!!

Messing up <u>had</u> become my way of life. i would go blindly to the next stage without thought or even an inkling of what or where I was going. I'd end in the same situation, same mode of thinking and without a way out, or so it seemed. Even if I had a period of strict study, service of duty, or sincere effort there I'd be, Messed up again.

When I graduated high school, I had planned on entering the Air Force and pursue my future through rigorous training and disciplined living. In other words, let somebody else tell me how to live and how to feel, without giving a second thought to the matter. Two points prevented that dream, that hope of discovery.

I sulked for about four months. Within that four months I met my husband and agreed to marry him with the hope of at least accomplish something positive in my life. As I struggled through my marital existence, I realized that those two points had cost me

the expense of my self esteem and some how I had to regain it.

I always had an urgency to fit in. To be a part of a family, to have a harmonious family unit. To be known as a correct and fitting part of a working unit. Trying so hard to fit I became a misfit. I would always feel that way until Ma would put her arms around me and tell me everything was going to be alright and that she loved me. But Ma is gone, and has been gone since May 29, 1979.

When I married in 1973, I truly believed that my husband was my best friend. Oh I could tell him anything. I would be able to sit upon his lap and just talk about the littlest to the biggest problem I was having. Everything that was a major concern to me (at least in my mind it was major as well as disturbing). I was able to tell him. But then something happened, that trust was violated. Everything, every inner thought that I shared with it. I shared my fears of not feeling really loved by my father. Uneasy about not knowing who my biological mother was, unsure about whether I'd ever conceive and give birth, and have a working relationship with him.

I sort of drifted after my divorce and it took constant battle to keep my sanity. I was unable to focus upon the divine plan God had for my life, or even remember what that plan might have been. I found myself reluctantly preparing for Sunday service. It all seemed boring to me and a chore instead of a pleasurable time to

become reacquainted, reintroduced, or able to bathe in God's glory at the end of a most trying week. Found myself daydreaming during worship, with the hope of getting through it very quickly. I wanted it to be over as quickly as possible so that I could go to the next phase. I had that attitude, "at least I came."

I often confuse myself with the thoughts of what it is that I'm searching for. I haven't found it yet. I can't seem to put my finger on it. Each time I'm asked to perform a task, one that involves creative thinking, I ask should I pursue this road? Or maybe I could write a book about my life, but then there are a zillion of those on the shelf now about famous people. I always had the idea of starting my own business. One that would require my gifts, to use them in a way that would glorify God my creator.

I find myself looking for my place in life. I've been looking for a long time. I have felt that I was getting closer, but somehow the directional signs were moved, and each road I take has been a dead end so far. Detours don't count, because they only cause you to go in circles in order to get back on the same road.

Along the way I sort of reconstructed God's plan for my life. I began creating haphazardly of course, my own happiness. I thought I was really enjoying myself. I drank as much whisky my belly could hold, I smoked as much reefer as my lungs could hold, I tried to snort up half of South America, and men were at an unlimited number. Wow!, at this point I believe I'll pause and thank God for

His grace.

The day, the moment, the exact second that I was reintroduced to Jesus, began a brand new journey in my walk. No! I will not be so presumptuous to say that I have perfected my walk, just that I am a lot more conscious about where and how I must walk. I have better vision, which gives me hope each day, and I thank my pastor, Rev. Ann Lightner for holding that door open for me through Christ Jesus.

Have you ever met somebody again for the first time. That commercial comes on the television set, in advertising Kellogg's Corn Flakes. I think of it every time that I think if the goodness of Jesus, and all that he has done for me. It was like a breath of fresh air. Our meeting again, was an encounter that did not proceed a sordid affair, didn't incorporate the re-living of our first meeting, but allowed a brand new beginning that gets gooder and gooder with each day. You see, Jesus gave me a new start and a different point of view of my life. I find myself thinking of ways to serve Him better, instead of waiting for someone to tell me how to serve Him. I only want to be what He would have me to be in order for Him to give me that ultimate assignment to complete. Serving Him isn't a task or a begrudging duty, as I once viewed it, and complete in an excellent way.

When my reintroduction to Jesus happened I was in a transitory state. I was only existing, participating in living and I had no

purpose; you know the song. I had decided that, okay I'll go to church, sit through worship and come out feeling no different, but at least I went. But when I was introduced, via Rev. Ann, I discovered that for true and for real Jesus loves me. I was given hope and a new way to serve that brings me sheer delight. Even when I find myself disappointed in what goes on around me, the disgruntled church member, the unhappy and unfulfilled board member, every reason to quit, I think about my best friend who never gives up. I think about Jesus.

Since my new relationship with Jesus, I have grown in new direction. Being associated with my beloved pastor, I have been granted the opportunity to be introduced to different workshops, women's bible studies, special worship services and to attend retreats that aid in building me up spiritually. I have regained my self esteem and use my strength and knowledge to encourage others.

WHERE AM I GOING? No place but up. I feel my self rising every day, even when it may seem to be turning into an awful day, my victory is in Jesus. I'm going up because, up is where my spirit has been pointed since the beginning of my existence. And besides up is where Jesus and Ma is.

WHERE AM I COMING FROM AND WHERE AM I GOING?

April [redacted]

September 1993

I am young woman who was raised by her grandparents mainly due to having a mother and father who were not ready to be parents. My childhood at times, was rather painful.

On many ocassions, my parents would take me away from my grandparents to live with them. Then, once they couldn't get along, I always ended up back with my grandparents. On a few accounts, my father and mother would fight and then my mother would end up having a nervous breakdown. This went on for some time. Whenever I ended up back with my grandparents, they would involve me in different activities (such as piano lessons, taking trips every summer, etc.) to help me "get back on track" after the mental abuse from my parents. Basically, my grandparents was all I had to depend on - they were always there for me.

When my parents were not together, they basically didn't have a lot of time for me because they were busy with their own lives. To me it seemed that everything always came before me---at least other relationships and other kids. Sometimes I wondered if they felt like I wasn't their daughter, or what I had I done to them. Later, I realized that there was nothing done wrong on my part. Also, the man my mother would go to after breaking up with my father

basically abused and controlled her. He didn't even allow much communication between my us. My mother would sometimes go 2 or 3 months before calling me. As for my father's girlfriends, on one hand they liked me and on the other hand, they were jealous of me--trying to win his attention, which in my opinion they had. However, life still continued and my grandparents always tried to make life before for me, and the way I saw it they did. This type of lifestyle went on over and over again during my whole childhood.

Then to make life a little more interesting, my grandparents announced that we were moving during the summer before my I first year in high school. However, they did allow me to continue to go to the same school. Moving was devastating because the new neighborhood didn't have any kids and it was approximately 15 to 20 minutes (by beltway) from my old neighborhood. But I did learn to adjust and now I love it.

During my school years, I was shy and quiet and an above average student. When I reached high school, I got into boys. My first boyfriend was probably my worse boyfriend. Unfortunately, when I was going with him I was blindly in love and didn't see the wrong roads he was leading me on, as well as the lies he told. Naturally, my entire family objected to me seeing him (my father even threatened him) which caused a lot of tension between me and my grandparents. But the relationship lasted a few years until finally I had enough, and then I started seeing other people. The other guys I was seeing didn't really mean much, and I didn't fall

in love with any of them. I just had fun with them.

As time went on, I became a Debutante, which was a great honor for me, and I graduated from high school. I went to a college that was close to home (5 minutes away) and began to make new friends and make a new lifestyle. While in college, my life changed a lot. I began to grow up more and see life for what it really was. I worked part-time and went to school full-time. I was actively involved in church - as always, however, I new I was beginning to grow more. My parents still continued in their normal manner, however, I didn't let their problems affect me the way I used to. Things that were hidden from me because I was a child came out in the open with my parents. I began to see my mother for who she was, and I realized she put herself into bad situations and then expected me to help her. Today, I still resent the way my mother and father treated me. But thanks to God, I don't hold it against them. I always help them when I can and I have never talked bad about them to anyone, and Lord knows I could have. My father for the last couple of years seems to really have gotten his act together. He realizes he can't make up for the lost time, but still tries anyway. I realized that he really loves me, but he just didn't know how to show it. My mother is trying to do better, however, she is still traveling on some rough roads. I just continue to pray for both of them and ask God to keep a watchful eye over them.

Meanwhile, I finally met someone who I really fell in love with.

With him, I learned the true meaning of the word LOVE. We have a great relationship---not perfect, but close! He basically came from a "Beaver Cleaver family" where everything was pretty much simple and perfect. He went to the best schools and his parents made good money and supplied a good life for him. He is my best friend, as well as my lover. I truly feel as though God sent him to me. We have grown together in so many ways, spiritually and mentally.

I will be married June 11, 1994, and I want to be moving in a direction where I can continue to get closer to God. I need to learn to trust and depend on him more. I need to stop the habit I have of praying about something and then taking the burden back instead of leaving it with God. God has brought me a mighty long ways, which I am truly thankful for. Also, I pray that God will make me the wife he would have me to be. I know it wont be an easy task, however, I know that with the love my fiancee and I have for each other and the love we have for God, it will work. As for my career, I'm presently praying on whether it is time for me to move on to something else. I don't want to get locked in and be in the same position 10-20 years from now.

Mentally, I pray that God will remove my unappealing qualities and make me a better person. At the age of 24, I still have a lot of ideas and uncertainties of where am I going, however, I just pray that God will keep me on the path of his choice and not mine. I also hope that I can some day be an example for someone to help them be where they need to be.

WHERE AM COMING FROM AND WHERE AM I GOING?

Jan [redacted]

September, 1993

I am from a family of six consisting of a wonderful mother and father and three sisters. I was born in Washington, D.C., where I lived for nine years. Washington is also the location where I accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior of my life. The name of the church is the Isle of Patmos Baptist Church. At Isle of Patmos I attended Sunday School, sung in the choir and was an active member. This was the church where I was baptized, and I will never forget the experience. When the Rev. Dr. George Rodgers prepared me to go down the water for baptism, I told him please don't let me go because I cannot swim, and he replied, "I will not let you go, just relax" and he started praying.

I guess as a child you could say I was just a church goer, and as I grew older I found myself getting into relationships where I was unequally yoked. Now by being in this relationship for a period of six years it was kind of hard to break the bond. But, I can truly say that I thank God for his grace and mercy that has brought me through these twenty eight years of my life. By sitting under the word of God and hearing the truth I began to put on strength by fasting and praying, then God gave me the wisdom and strength that I needed in order to break this relationship. Now since I broke the relationship and bond, I knew that I needed to

start being committed to God. So, I started praying that the Lord will allow me to do his will and not mine. So as time went by I met a young man by the name of Gillian Williams. We hit it off from the start. He is also one of my best friends. He used to sit right next to me on my job. When I noticed him one day writing the different books of the bible. Then he also started talking about the goodness of God and we've become so close that nothing or no one could separate us. We pray together, read the word of God together, worship together and shop together. We thank God for each other because we have truly been a blessing spiritually as well as naturally to each other. My family is close to him as well. I remember when my mother first met Gillian she said Jan he reminds me of my grandmother, because she would sit down and quote scripture and talk about the word of God just like Gillian was when he met my mother. What I really like about Gillian is I can talk to him just like I talk to God and he hears my concerns and understands. Our friendship is clean and I definitely have a friend I can trust. It is only the love of God between us, not a worldly love but a Godly love. Now, that I am growing and decreasing daily, I know that whatever situation confronts me, that I can fall down on my knees and make request known unto my God and he will deliver me int he time of trouble. Sometimes I have to do like King David, cry out in my distress, cry out in my distress and he will come to see about his child. Because after all I am a child of the King!

WHERE AM I COMING FROM AND WHERE AM I GOING?

Shawnise [redacted]

I was born to young parents, my mother was 18 and my father was 24. My parents eloped before I was born, and when I turned 2 years old, the three of us moved to Albany, New York. We remained in New York for 9 years, then moved back to Baltimore.

My parents had an o.k. marriage. Looking back, I see that although my parents' marriage had its ups and downs, they had happier times in Albany than in Baltimore. Also, as a family (my parents, my younger brother, and myself) we had better times in Albany. The move back to Baltimore may have been financially sound for my father, but it was a giant step backwards for my mother.

My mother is a strong willed person. When things get her down, she finds the energy to put matters into perspective and do what she has to do to prevail. I really admire that quality in her.

When I turned 5 years old, the tradition from that year until the year we moved back to Baltimore, I was sent to Baltimore for the summer to stay with my maternal grandparents. Every Sunday I was in church from Sunday school through the morning service. In Albany my family probably went to church for one year of all the nine years we were there. I loved Sunday school, and I can

remember about the last year we were in Albany, I use to go to Sunday school. When we moved back to Baltimore, the summer tradition of attending church with my grandparents became a regular weekly tradition with my grandmother (my grandfather was deceased when we moved back). My parents did not go to church with us every Sunday, but they would go for special occasions, like the times I sang on the choir for Thanksgiving Day, when I was in an Easter play, when I was baptised, and when I joined the Missionaries.

I stopped attending the church I was raised in, on a regular basis, once I was in college. The four years I lived with my boyfriend, now husband, I did not attend church at all. I was missing not attending church, so every now and again my mother and I would visit a different church. I never went back to the church I grew up in because I had never really felt close to anyone.

When my daughter was born, I vowed that I would find a church to call my home. When my daughter was 22 months old, I found Mt. Calvary A.M.E. Church, and instantly I knew this was where I belonged.

I have rededicated my life to Christ and I am striving to be the best Christian I can. When God looks down at me, I want him to be proud of who he sees. All the years that I belonged to that other church, I believed that yelling, shouting, and jumping up out of your seat once you have received the Holy Ghost was undignified. I told my grandmother that no one will ever see me doing that. But

now, after just one year of attending Mt. Calvary, I see people receiving the Holy Ghost in a brand new light. There is nothing undignified about it.

At present, I am 29 years old and my marriage is falling apart. My husband, who was not raised in church, can not understand my rededication to Christ. All he can see is that church is taking me away from him. To him church should be taken in moderation. By attending church every Sunday, going to Bible Study on Wednesday nights, once a month Sister Sharing, and being involved in the young childrens' choir is taking too much of my time away from him. I keep telling him that I am doing what makes me happy. He keeps telling me that I am going to church myself to death, and that I put him last. Do you want to hear something funny? When my husband was on a softball league last spring, he chose to play Wednesday evenings and Sunday morning games. He would ask me to come out and watch him play ball, and when I would tell him that I was going to church, he would get an attitude. The few times I did go out to see him play, he would get on my nerves, because he expected me to watch our two year old daughter and him at the same time. So of course when he hit a home run and I did not see it, because I was chasing after our daughter, he would become hostile towards me.

I am glad that I rededicated my life to Christ when I did, because I am really going to need his infinite wisdom and spiritual knowledge to keep my mind clear and focused on what seems to be inevitable in my marriage, a separation or a divorce.

WHERE AM I COMING FROM AND WHERE AM I GOING?

Sharon [redacted]

I came into being on October 25, 1945 in a trailer in Fairfield, MD. I was the youngest of three children born to a 33 year old woman whose husband was 22 years her senior. My sister is 2 years older than I. She had my brother by a previous marriage and wanted no more children. I could understand that because she was the oldest girl of 12 children, with a twin brother. Mom had a hard childhood taking care of all those siblings, working on a farm and not being able to go to school as she wanted to.

She probably thought that my father would not want any more kids either. My father has 3 children that are my mother's age. But, with all of her reminders that, "Your daddy begged me to have you," she loved us.

She was very strict and did not spare the rod. She believed that children should be seen and not heard and she believed every lie and grown up would tell on us. I remember my sister getting beatings because a neighbor lied to cover for her child. That saddened me but I understood that mom would never lie on another child, so how could she believe another adult would?

My dad would spoil us rotten. He would sneak candy to us after we were in bed. When mom would get on him about disciplining us, he would pretend to beat us with his belt and we would pretend

to cry. Dad would hit the quilts. We were too dumb to let that suffice. We kept being noisy until mom would come with the belt and remove the quilt to hit our raw meat. That's all it took.

I only remember my mother, father, sister and me in my early childhood. I can't remember where my brother was. I know he was there, I just can't remember him. I remember delicious pancakes cooked on an old fashioned griddle top wood stove. I remember a man delivering a great big block of ice to put in our ice box to keep our food cold. I remember my Aunt Blanche bringing live crabs to our house very early on Saturday mornings, about 3 times during the summer. I was afraid of those creepy, crawly things, still am, but I love them just the same. I remember eating fried chicken on Sunday and fish on Friday. I remember the milkman bringing milk with the cream separated on top. I remember my mother bringing me up in winter to go up the street to meet my sister after school. I was so well padded that when I fell, I would either roll back up to my feet or find it very difficult to move while getting up, but I was never hurt. I remember visiting Aunt Blanche who always had goodies for us even though mom said to say, "No, thank you." Aunt Blanche knew how poor and proud mom was and always insisted taht we eat. Later, I found out that is really why mom took us there although she would never eat.

I remember a warm day in 1950 when mom was planning a birthday party for me at age 5. It must have been Indian Summer when my headaches began. They were very painful. I got really sick and I

remember mom crying whild rapping me up and taking me back and forth to the doctor. I was admitted eventually to Johns Hopkins hospital, diagnosis: "Polio" or Infantile Paralysis. That is where I spent my birthday. I remember my birthday toy from my Aunt Blanche. It was a funny little man that did something mechanically. I remember how I loved that toy and when the polio virus was cured and they transfered me to Children's Hospital School for rehabilitation, they would not let me take it or any of my toys. My heart was broken and I cried relentlessly. They were afraid of spreading polio to my new environment. I thought they were being mean.

I stayed in the hospital past Christmans of 1950. I was put by a window so that I could see my sister because she had to be 16 to come in. I think it was my choice to stay in the hospital for Christmas because of all the anticipated activities. For about 2 weeks before Christmas, each night, some organization would come and bring gifts to all of us. Each bringing their own Santa. I remember a black Santa, a white Santa, a tall Santa, a short Santa, a fat Santa, a thin Santa or any combination each night for 2 weeks. Now how was a 5 year old suppose to believe in one Santa? I didn't question it at the time because they all mad me happy.

From age 5 through 12 there were back braces, physical therapy and a hand operation. My spine was curving as a result of Polio, but I did not know that then. I could see that my right shoulder was lower than my left but I thought it would stay taht way. I

didn't know it was progressive and surgery was imminent before I stopped growing. Mom was afraid that I would die from the operation and, of course, nobody asked me.

At age 12, before school closed for summer vacation, Mom and I went to Children's Hospital for my annual checkup. Dr. McDonnell looked at mom and said, "Well, mother"? Mom looked sad and told him no. Well, excuse me but what were they talking about? Well, what? As I began to question them mom finally told me about the operation to straighten my spine and that she was afraid that I would die. Dr. McDonnell showed me my x-ray where my spine looked like a question mark. He explained that by the time I reached adulthood, I would be bent over totally, he was right, about halfway to the ground. I turned to mom and asked, "Who's going to marry me like that"? "I would rather die than be like that"! My statements shocked my mother, but persuaded her to give her consent. We would sugically correct this condition, scoliosis, as soon as school was out.

When school closed, I called the hospital to set up a date of admittance. They informed me that Dr. McDonnell was on vacation and would not be back for 4 weeks. I was shocked. How could he go on vacation when he was suppose to operate on me during my summer vacation, so that I would not miss school in September? I gave people at the hospital a fit until they admitted me one week before Dr. McDonnell returned to do pre-op testing. Surgery was complicated and I missed my entire 8th grade year of school. I did

not fail because I had a tutor.

I returned to school for 9th grade and was graduated to the 10th grade at Frederick Douglas Senior High School. This was my first normal city school. I went to Francis M. Wood Elementary for handicapped kids for 5 years. I skipped 6th grade and was graduated to William S. Bear school for 7th grade. I was bused to both of these schools. The city did provide taxi service for me during my senior high school years. People thought my parents were rich to send me to and from school every day for 3 years in a cab. Of course, I didn't tell them any different. Only my closest friends knew.

I did not do well in tenth grade. It was hard to adjust from 2 nurturing schools to a school where teachers were cold and impersonal. I became an honor student in grade 11 and remained there until graduation in June 1962.

In September of 1962 I entered Morgan State College, at age 16. I went full time for 1 1/2 years until I fell in love. I got pregnant, married, and dropped out of college in 1964. My husband, Elton Leroy Faulkner, worked at White Coffee Pot Restaurants. We were poor and I did not work. We were not happy. The only joy in my life then was my beautiful little girl, Monique. Lee, short for Leroy, went to New York where he could make more money. I was returned home to my parents in 1965.

Lee went to Newburgh, New York, got a job and wanted me to move there with him. On the advice of his brother, I would not. Lee then moved to Albany, got a job and started to buy a house. I did not go for about a year. Buying a house made me think he might be settling down. Monique and I went to Albany, N.Y. on her 2nd birthday, August 12, 1964. She didn't know her father and would not let him near me for weeks. We stayed in Albany for 9 years after that. Most of those 9 years were happy and we did well financially. I worked for the State of New York. Lee did construction work and then became an arc welder.

In 1969 I had Elton St. Clair Faulkner. We were so happy. Everyone wanted a boy except Monique. She wanted me to trade him for a girl while at the hospital.

About 1975 all construction work came to a halt. Construction workers were receiving unemployment compensation. As Lee's checks were about to run out, they were told that there was plenty of work in Baltimore and south. So I gave up my wonderful job and we came home. Lee has too much family here and that was the downfall of our marriage along with drugs.

We bought a row house in 1977 and things went well for a while. I tried to make the marriage work but one can't do it alone. I hung on, not because my children needed a father, but because I needed someone to do the things that I could not do physically for the kids. When the kids were self-sufficient

physically and both driving, I felt that I had had enough. Lee left February 5, 1988 and we were divorced April 4, 1990.

I have been struggling to make ends meet since he left but the peace of mind that I have is worth it. I was gradually pulling myself up when I went back into debt trying to get legal help for my mother. My brother, along with 2 crooked lawyers, caused me not to have guardianship of my mother.

I hired a black law firm, Hollis and Associates, who are charging me $4,000.00 and got nothing accomplished. My sister was suppose to pay half but she refuses and we did not speak for one year. I gave it to God so that he would heal the ache in my heart. I had my sister here for Christmas dinner.

I am now on a writing campaign to free my mother of these strangers who have taken over her life and property. She can't get the benefit of her own money and doesn't have enough to put in church.

With God's help and guidance, I am going to get my mother out of this situation which she hates. I am going to become the best computer specialist that I can be. I am going to become healthier by changing my eating habits and getting more rest. I am going to be a positive influence to everyone, especially my children and granddaughter. I am going to make sure that my granddaughter has everything she needs to become a well educated, positive, Christian

young lady that, I know, God wants her to be. I am going to buy a home on one level, which will also make me healthier. I am going to find myself a husband, with a sense of God about him, to share my life with. I am going to follow a budget because that is the only way that I can make sure that God gets his 10 percent first. I am going to help women understand that putting God first in their lives can help them become self sufficient and strong enough not to be misused and abused.

Since I have put God first in my live, I do believe that I can accomplish all of these things while giving God the Glory. And when God comes, "like a thief in the night," I am going to be, "caught up to meet Him in the air."

APPENDIX B

SUPPLEMENTS TO THE MODEL:

1. SAMPLE MEETING ANNOUNCEMENTS
2. SISTERS SHARING DIRECTORY
3. FASTING AND PRAYER GUIDELINE
4. SAMPLE PRAISE SONGS

MEMORANDUM

TO: All Sisters Sharing Members

FROM: April [redacted] Secretary

DATE: June 1, 1993

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Our next fellowship will be on Saturday, June 12, 1993 at 8 AM at Rev. Lightner's house.

For your information, I have enclosed a flyer from Ebenezer A.M.E. Church in Fort Washington, Maryland advertising their Annual Women's Retreat in Virginia for 1994. Along with some of the members from Sisters Sharing, I was blessed to attend Ebenezer's Retreat for 1993 a few weeks ago, and I recommend that everyone sign-up to go. **It was truly a blessing out of this world!!!**

Hope to see you next Saturday!

/amb

Enclosure

N O T I C E

TO: All Sisters Sharing Members

FROM: April [redacted], Secretary

DATE: September 14, 1993

DUE TO A SCHEDULE CONFLICT, OUR FELLOWSHIP HAS BEEN CHANGED FROM SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 18TH TO **SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 25TH** AT 8:00 AM AT REV. LIGHTNER'S HOUSE.

HOPE TO SEE YOU THERE!

SISTERS SHARING DIRECTORY

NAME/BIRTHDATE	ADDRESS	PHONE #	MARRIED	CHILDREN
[redacted]	4414-D Falls Bridge Dr. Balto., MD 21211	889-0726	N	Y
[redacted]	5005 A-8 Dickey Hill Rd. Balto., MD 21207	448-4002	Y	Y
[redacted]	1032 Evesham Ave. Balto., MD 21212	433-3306	S	Y
[redacted]	4815 Midline Rd. Balto., MD 21206		M	Y
[redacted]	4516 St. Georges Ave. Balto., MD 21212	435-1472	S	N
[redacted]	2413 Fleetwood Ave. Balto., MD 21214	444-2032	Y	Y
[redacted]	20 Meter Court Balto., MD 21234	494-0547	N	N
[redacted]	2261 Pentland Dr. Balto., MD 21234	319-9251	S	Y
[redacted]	411 Greenspring Valley Rd. Garrison, MD 21055	356-2716	N	N
[redacted]	2501 Hallam Court Balto., MD 21207	944-7358	S	Y
[redacted]	829 Wedgewood Rd. Balto., MD 21229	566-3931	Y	Y
[redacted]	2539 Boarman Ave. Balto., MD 21225	542-3150	Y	Y
[redacted]	9916 Tuscarora Rd. Randallstown, MD 21133	922-6544	Y	Y
[redacted]	3416 Park Hgts. Ave. Balto., MD 21215	225-3437	N	Y
[redacted]	6719 Bonnie Ridge Dr. Apt. 101 Balto., MD 21209	484-9760	N	N
[redacted]	2635 Sarrington Circle Balto., MD 21244	944-7291	Y	Y

[redacted]	169 McCorkel Ave. Paulsboro, NJ 08066	(609) 423-2115	Y
[redacted]	14 Astro Court Balto., MD 21234	823-1949	Y
[redacted]	5900 The Alameda Balto., MD 21239	433-5023	Y
[redacted]	5801 Hillen Rd. Apt. D Balto., MD 21239	254-5395	N
[redacted]	2 Comet Court Balto., MD 21234	583-1392	
[redacted]	616 Woodbourne Ave. Balto., MD 21212		
[redacted]	1201 Harwood Ave., Apt. B7 Balto., MD 21239	323-6919	
[redacted]	4914 Challedon Rd. C3 Balto., MD	448-0813	
[redacted]	1248 Walker Ave. Balto., MD 21239	323-8494	
[redacted]	5931 Chinquapin Pkwy Balto., MD 21239	323-0730	
[redacted]	12 Wooden Court Way Pikesville, MD 21207	922-5680	

...and Jesus said, these things come only by fasting and prayer. St. Matthew 17:21

Beloved Sisters in Christ Jesus:

I thank God Almighty that you have consented to make the sacrifice to fast and pray with me during the month of May. Some of you will fast seven (7) days beginning Monday, May 3rd, but someone will be fasting everyday during the entire month of May. You will not be alone. We trust God that at least two (2) persons will be fasting everyday. Already ten (10) persons have committed to fast the seven (7) days with me.

In order that we might be on one accord, please follow the guidelines for our fast listed below. Remember this is a covenant walk together. If you feel weak, call a member of the group and have prayer together. You should pray with your specific prayer partner daily.

We will begin each morning with prayer and bible reading at 7:00 a.m. If your schedule permits, please commit one (1) hour for this period of devotion. However, if you cannot give the entire hour, it is important that you pray and read the word. Our Scripture focus will be the Book of Ruth in its entirety. Read it through at least once daily:

- Women of God who are outside the fellowship.
- Women who are alone in their journey.
- Women who need to dedicate their lives to the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Women who are in pain.

Let us remember our theme, "We Are Our Sister's Keeper".

Remember that the word of God says, "And all things whatsoever you shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." St. Matthew 21:22

Because of Christ,

Rev. Ann F. Lightner, Pastor

This is the day (repeat)
That the Lord has made

PRAISE THE NAME OF JESUS
II Samuel 22:2-3 Psalms 18:2

Praise the name of Jesus (repeat)
He's my rock, He's my fortress
He's my deliverer
In Him will I trust
Praise the name of Jesus

WE BRING THE SACRIFICE OF PRAISE

We bring the sacrifice of praise into the house of the Lord (repeat)
And we offer up to you the sacrifices of thanksgiving
And we offer up to you the sacrifices of praise

BLESS THE LORD

Bless the Lord, Oh my soul
And all that is within me
Bless His Holy name

He has done great things (3 times)
Bless His Holy name

HE'S WORTHY, GOD'S WORTHY

He's worthy, God's worthy
Almighty Creator
Alpha, Omega, beginning and the end
Holy, Holy Lord God almighty
Which was and is and is to come
Hallelujah (4 times)

I LOVE YOU LORD

I love you Lord and I lift my voice
To worship You, Oh my soul rejoice
Take joy, my King in what You hear
Let it be a sweet, sweet sound in your ear

COME BLESS THE LORD

Come bless the Lord
All ye servants of the Lord
Who stand by night
In the house of the Lord
Lift up your hands
In this holy place
And bless the Lord (repeat)

LORD PREPARE ME

Lord prepare me to be a sanctuary
Pure and holy, tried and true
With thanksgiving I'll be a living sanctuary for You

IN HIM WE LIVE
Acts 17:28

In Him we live and move
And have our being
In Him we live and move
And have our being

Make a joyful noise
Sing unto the Lord
Tell Him of your love
Dance before Him
Make a joyful noise
Sing unto the Lord
Tell Him of your love
Hallelujah

THERE IS POWER IN THE BLOOD OF THE LAMB

There is power, power Wonder working power In the blood of the lamb There is power, power Wonder working power In the precious blood of the lamb

I will bless your name
And give you glory

MY SOUL FOLLOWS HARD AFTER THEE
Psalm 63:7,8

My soul follows hard after Thee
Early in the morning will I rise up and seek Thee
And because Thou hast been my help
Under the shadow of thy wing I will rejoice

BLESSED BE THE NAME OF THE LORD

Blessed be the name of the Lord
He is worthy to be praised and adored
So we lift up holy hands with one accord
Singing blessed be the name
Blessed be the name
Blessed be the name of the Lord

I'LL CHOOSE YOU AGAIN

I'll choose you again and again
I'll choose you again and again
You mean so much to me dear Lord
I'll choose you again (repeat)

LORD, I'M GONNA LOVE YOU

Lord I'm gonna love you
Love you, Lord
Lord, I'm gonna love you
Love you, Lord
Lord I'm gonna love you
With all that's in my heart

Lord, I'm gonna follow
Follow you
Lord, I'm gonna follow
Follow you
Lord, I'm gonna follow you
With all of my heart

Lord, I'm gonna worship
Worship you
Lord, I'm gonna worship
Worship you

Lord, I'm gonna worship you
With all that's in my heart

WORTHY, YOU ARE WORTHY

Worthy, you are worthy
King of kings, Lord of lords

You are worthy
Worthy, you are worthy
King of kings, Lord of lords
I worship you

Holy, you are Holy
King of kings, Lord of lords

You are Holy
Holy, you are Holy
King of kings, Lord of lords
I worship you

Jesus, you are Jesus
King of kings, Lord of lords
You are Jesus
Jesus, you are Jesus
King of kings, Lord of lords
I worship you

YOU ARE MY GOD

You are my God, you are my King
You are my Master, my everything
You are Lord, that's why I sing to you Hallelujah

LET YOUR SPIRIT RISE WITHIN ME

Let you spirit rise within me
Let your spirit rise within me
You set my feet a-dancing
And my heart rejoicing
And my mouth singing out your praise (repeat)

You alone are great God, And worthy to be praised (repeat)

PRAISE HIM

Praise Him, Praise Him
Praise Him in the morning
Praise Him in the noontime
Praise Him when the sun goes down

JESUS YOU'RE THE CENTER OF MY JOY

Jesus you're the center of my joy
All that's good and perfect comes from you
You're the heart of my contentment
Hope for all I do
Jesus you're the center of my joy

When I've lost my direction
You're the compass for my way; you're the fire
and light when nights are long and cold; In
sadness you're the laughter that shatters all my fears When I'm all alone your hand is there to hold

You are why I find pleasure
In the simple things in life
You're reason in the meadows and the streams; the voices of the children, my family and my friends; You're the source and finish of my highest dream

ALLELUIA

Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia
Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia
Lord, we love you (repeat)
Lord, we praise you (repeat)

BECAUSE HE LIVES

Because He lives I can face tomorrow
Because He lives all fear is gone
Because I know He holds the future
And life is worth the living just
because He lives

THEY THAT WAIT UPON THE LORD

They that wait upon the Lord
Shall renew their strength
They shall mount up with wings as eagles
They shall run and not be weary
They shall walk and not faint
Teach me Lord, teach me Lord
How to wait

THE LORD REIGNETH

The Lord reigneth, the Lord God reigneth
Blessed be the name of the Lord
For the Lord thou God is Omnipotent
He reigneth forevermore

IN THE NAME OF JESUS

In the name of Jesus, in the name of Jesus
We have the victory
In the name of Jesus, in the name of Jesus
Satan you have to flee
Tell me who can stand before us
When we call on His great name
Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus
We have the victory

HOLY, HOLY, HOLY

Holy, Holy, Holy
Lord God Almighty
Early in the morning
Our song shall rise to thee
Holy, Holy, Holy
Merciful and mighty
God in three person
Blessed Trinity

BLESS YE THE LORD (con't)
Psalm 134:1-2

Lift up your hands in the sanctuary
And bless the Lord (repeat 3 times)

PRAISE THE NAME OF JESUS

Praise the name of Jesus
Praise the Son of God
Glory, Glory be to Christ our King
Jesus Christ, Son of God
Jesus Christ is the Son of God

Praise the name of Jesus
Praise the Lamb who died
Glory, Glory be to Christ our King
Jesus Christ, Lamb who died
Jesus Christ is the Lamb who died

Praise the name of Jesus
Praise the risen Lord
Glory, Glory be to Christ our King
Jesus Christ, Risen Lord
Jesus Christ is the risen Lord

AMAZING GRACE

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me
I once was lost, but now I'm found
Was blind but now I see

SPIRIT OF THE LIVING GOD

Spirit of the living God, fall fresh on me
Spirit of the living God, fall fresh on me
Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me
Spirit of the living God, fall fresh on me

O GIVE UNTO THE LORD
Psalm 29

O give unto the Lord, O ye mighty one

Give unto the Lord, Glory and strength Give unto the Lord, the Glory due to His name Worship the Lord in the beauty of Holiness

Worship the Lord in the beauty of Holiness

THANKS FOR THE BLOOD
Matthew 26:28

Thanks for the blood, the blood of Calvary
Thanks for the blood, the blood of Calvary
Thanks for your love Oh thank you Father for Jesus
Thank you Jesus for bleeding
Thank you Spirit for leading me to the cross

THE STEADFAST LOVE

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases
His mercies never come to an end
They are new every morning, new every morning
Great is thy faithfulness, Oh great is thy faithfulness

HEAR MY CRY, O LORD
Psalm 61:1-2

Hear my cry, O Lord
Attend unto my prayer
From the ends of the earth
Will I cry unto thee
When my heart is overwhelmed
Lead me to the rock that is higher than I

APPENDIX C

TOWSON DEMOGRAPHICS

1. EAST TOWSON COMMUNITY CONSERVATION AREA/ACTION PLAN
2. TOTAL AND BLACK POPULATION 1980-1990
3. THE BALTIMORE SUN, MAY 10, 1992 - "EAST TOWSON FIGHTS DEVELOPMENT"
4. AFRO AMERICAN NEWSPAPER, MAY 11, 1991 (FOUR GENERATIONS OF JOHNSON WOMEN AT MT. CALVARY)

EAST TOWSON COMMUNITY CONSERVATION AREA/ACTION PLAN

1. ACTION PLAN

INTRODUCTION

The Baltimore County Master Plan 1989-2000 clearly designated certain areas of the County as "enhancement areas." They were defined as "communities that have experienced a degree of physical decline and require County action to address specific problems such as poor condition of public facilities and private housing stock." (p.38)

They are primarily located in older areas of Baltimore County; some border commercial centers.

Action plans should be developed for these enhancement areas in order to stabilize these residential communities, and to continue to make them desirable places in which to live. They should have priority for the use of C.I.P. (Capital Improvement Program) funds for infrastructure improvements, open space acquisition, community services and facilities as well as for affordable housing. These sorts of improvements will foster civic involvement among the communities' current residents and may favorably influence prospective home buyers.

PROCESS

The East Towson African American Community has developed a community conservation plan for this enhancement area in order to achieve neighborhood stabilization, redevelopment of affordable infill housing and adequate buffers and protection from commercial encroachment of the Towson commercial core.

A community work group comprised of East Towson property owners and residents has worked over the last 10 months to develop an action plan for strengthening the residential community. Meetings were held bi- weekly and often weekly, and were open to the public. Nine business owners and developers were invited to discuss development proposals for sites near the community; seven participated by giving presentations and answering questions. The results of work group meetings were communicated to the residents of the East Towson community by monthly meetings of the Northeast Towson Community Association. Several door-to-door surveys were conducted concerning strategies for community conservation, the type of housing desired, as well

DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

The following chart indicates the population changes from 1970 - 1990 within the East Towson community. (See Map 2).

	1970*	1980*	1990**
TOTAL POPULATION	397	396	335
OWNER OCCUPIED UNITS	53	55	64
RENTAL UNITS	59	74	43
VACANT UNITS	---	---	4

*Data source - U. S. Census Bureau
**Population - U. S. Census Bureau
Housing tenure is estimated

The most significant trend is the loss of total population, with the 1990 population being only 85% of the 1980 population. The loss of rental units also appears to be important, the 1990 rental units are 58% of the 1980 number. (Only 11% of that decline can be attributed to an increase in home ownership).

The population is aging as is the overall Towson population. In order to remain viable, as a residential community, younger people and young families need housing opportunities within the community.

EXISTING LAND USE

The East Towson community conservation plan comprises approximately 31 acres ± with the predominant land use being single family and semi-detached dwellings and townhouses. Additional uses include the two churches, the St. James A.U.M.P. Church at 413 Jefferson Avenue and the Mt. Calvary A.M.E. Church at 300 Eudowood Lane and the Carver School at 300 Lennox Avenue. These institutional uses serve as anchors for this community. The Elks Lodge at 411 E. Pennsylvania Avenue is a fraternal orgainization that is an important social organization within the community.

Other non-residential land uses include the Baltimore Gas & Electric sub-station, Gambrill's Plumbing and Heating Contractor's office at 318 E. Pennsylvania Avenue and Technigraphics of Maryland at 398 Eudowood Lane.

PROPOSED LAND USES

Since neighborhood stabilization and community conservation are the primary objectives of this plan, redevelopment of vacant infill parcels with affordable infill housing will achieve these objectives. All parcels unless otherwise noted as open space have the preferred proposed land use of affordable housing. (See map prepared by the Neighborhood Design Center, page 24.)

The "transitional blocks," the east side of Virginia Avenue and the south side of Pennsylvania that are proposed for rezoning from R.O. to R.O.A. are preferred to continue their current use which is largely single family or semi-detached dwellings. Conversions may occur to Class A Office Buildings or any of the other uses listed in the uses by Right and Uses by Special Exception Section of this document. (See pages 13-17.)

The Elks Lodge will remain at its location on 411 East Pennsylvania Avenue. If in the future, plans develop for its renovation or expansion, they should be reviewed with the community prior to submittal to Baltimore County.

Expansion of the Mt. Calvary A.M.E. Church is highly desirable; it will be able to better serve the needs of the community after renovations and additions have occurred. Fellowship space, a church office, day care, meeting rooms, as well as a larger seating capacity will be provided by this major expansion proposal.

The Carver School is desirable for full use as a community/recreation center. A portion of the building is currently utilized for a Head Start program and meeting rooms; there is an existing outdoor recreation area. The building must undergo a structural assessment in order to determine the feasibility of a full conversion. The East Towson community could share space with other nearby residential communities such as Towson Manor Village and the highrises, Virginia Towers and the Ridgeley Condominiums.

The Baltimore Gas & Electric sub-station located in the area since 1952 will remain at its location on the south side of Pennsylvania Avenue, and the west side of Railroad Avenue. The Baltimore Gas & Electric Company will work with both the comunity and the Office of Planning & Zoning to provide better landscaping/screening around the perimeter of their site and the parking lot. This screening may involve the planting of evergreen shrubs/trees and placing slats within the existing fence.

Technigraphics of Maryland, formerly Maryland Etching will remain at its location on Eudowood Lane. Any plans to expand this facility should be reviewed with the East Towson community prior to their submittal to Baltimore County. In the long term, this site should be considered for housing in keeping with the design plan as indicated on pages 25-26.

Total and BLACK Population, 1980-1990

RPD	RPD NAME		TOTAL POPULATION 1980	1990	1980-90 CHANGE	% CHANGE	BLACK 1980	1990	1980-90 CHANGE	% CHANGE
301	HEREFORD-MD. LINE		8,973	11,398	2,425	27.0%	152	170	18	11.8%
302	PRETTYBOY		3,960	4,402	442	11.2%	21	32	11	52.4%
303	FOWBLESBURG	*	3,949	3,947	(2)	-0.1%	254	102	(152)	-59.8%
304	SPARKS		3,066	5,332	2,266	73.9%	196	182	(14)	-7.1%
305	JACKSONVILLE		7,607	9,547	1,940	25.5%	139	81	(58)	-41.7%
306	REISTERSTOWN-OWINGS MILLS	*	32,154	34,764	2,610	8.1%	3,848	4,803	955	24.8%
307	CHESTNUT RIDGE		4,744	8,164	3,420	72.1%	23	103	80	347.8%
308	LUTHERVILLE	*	20,861	23,704	2,843	13.6%	172	244	72	41.9%
309	COCKEYSVILLE-TIMONIUM		23,550	24,800	1,250	5.3%	439	984	545	124.1%
310	FORK		6,848	6,829	(19)	-0.3%	83	68	(15)	-18.1%
311	HARRISONVILLE	*	4,463	4,345	(118)	-2.6%	341	626	285	83.6%
312	RANDALLSTOWN	*	24,646	26,123	1,477	6.0%	4,017	9,204	5,187	129.1%
313	PIKESVILLE		28,513	33,076	4,563	16.0%	985	1,573	588	59.7%
314	RUXTON	*	5,062	4,917	(145)	-2.9%	17	20	3	17.6%
315	TOWSON	*	66,223	63,058	(3,165)	-4.8%	3,164	5,687	2,523	79.7%
316	PARKVILLE	*	33,694	32,795	(899)	-2.7%	618	939	321	51.9%
317	PERRY HALL-WHITE MARSH		28,202	45,681	17,479	62.0%	406	1,291	885	218.0%
318	KINGSVILLE		4,390	4,697	307	7.0%	53	36	(17)	-32.1%
319	LOCHEARN		50,251	51,713	1,462	2.9%	20,090	32,092	12,002	59.7%
320	OVERLEA		16,348	15,727	(621)	-3.8%	1,610	2,236	626	38.9%
321	ROSSVILLE		8,941	9,995	1,054	11.8%	792	1,407	615	77.7%
322	WINDLASS		14,233	17,504	3,271	23.0%	2,386	2,517	131	5.5%
323	SECURITY		31,057	34,295	3,238	10.4%	3,059	6,998	3,939	128.8%
324	CATONSVILLE		28,615	29,919	1,304	4.6%	2,906	3,147	241	8.3%
325	ARBUTUS-LANSDOWNE		36,922	35,259	(1,663)	-4.5%	1,210	1,720	510	42.1%
326	ROSEDALE		11,831	10,523	(1,308)	-11.1%	31	52	21	67.7%
327	MIDDLE RIVER		18,433	18,101	(332)	-1.8%	877	1,045	168	19.2%
328	ESSEX		47,457	46,493	(964)	-2.0%	1,567	3,591	2,024	129.2%
329	DUNDALK-TURNER'S STATION		42,836	39,656	(3,180)	-7.4%	3,608	3,393	(215)	-6.0%
330	NORTH POINT		28,708	26,161	(2,547)	-8.9%	389	632	243	62.5%
331	EDGEMERE		9,078	9,209	131	1.4%	502	476	(26)	-5.2%
BALTIMORE COUNTY			655,615	692,134	36,519	5.6%	53,955	85,451	31,496	58.4%

The Sun
MAY 10, 1992

EAST TOWSON FIGHTS DEVELOPMENT

ELEEN RYAN/STAFF PHOTO

: Jones is among the longtime residents of the community of owson, believed to be Baltimore County's first community.

Community fears losing 200 years of stability

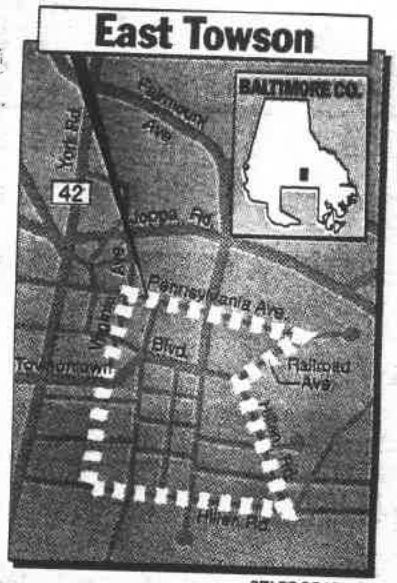
Mary E. Medland
Contributing Writer

Nestled virtually within a stone's throw of the ever-expanding downtown Towson is East Towson, a small enclave that was originally settled by former slaves freed after the death in 1790 of Capt. Charles Ridgely, owner of the Hampton Mansion.

East Towson, which is believed to be the county's first community, has remained a stable black neighborhood for more than 200 years. But that stability is periodically threatened by efforts to further develop downtown Towson. The community is almost continually fighting to protect itself from the encroachment of Towson's sprawl.

Over the past 30 years, Towson has undergone some major development projects, most recently the reopening of the expanded Towson Town Center mall and the opening of Towson Commons, an office and retail complex on York Road.

Residents of East Towson are determined to protect their community from encroaching development and to attract new people to the neighborhood, which is listed by the county as an enhancement area, an community targeted for more owner-occupied housing and physical improvements.



STAFF GRAPHICS

The community of small detached, wood-frame homes roughly defined by Virginia Avenue on the west, Hillen Road on the south, Railroad Avenue on the east, and an irregular boundary on the north, appears to be well on its way to success in its preservation efforts. But the fight has been long and strenuous.

Thirty years ago, East Towson had between 150 and 160 single-family, owner-occupied homes. It was a quiet, serene neighborhood

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...E CITY EDITION

May 11, 1991

"...best newspaper in America"

Afro-American

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BALTIMORE, MD ...99th Year No. 40 50 CENTS

Four generations of Johnson women help Mt. Calvary A.M.E. Church of Towson to help others (L to R) Mrs. Doris Johnson, great grandmother, Mrs. Keionna Neal, granddaughter, Mrs. Ursula Slade, daughter, Miss Brittany Neal, great granddaughter.

Alisa Washington
AFRO Staff Reporter

Four generations of women are carrying on a family tradition of church service that dates back to the 1800's.

Mrs. Doris Johnson, a retired Baltimore City Public School employee and the family matriarch, is the glue helping to hold this close knit group of three adult women and a six month old great-granddaughter together.

Each has learned to covet family, the church, and one another.

In addition to being a mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother, Mrs. Johnson is also an integral part of Mt. Calvary A.M.E. Church, located at 300 Eudowood Lane in Towson, where she has worshiped since she was a small child.

Today, she devotes about 25 hours of her time each

(Continued on Page A3)

(Continued from Page A1)

week at the church where she serves as superintendent of the Sunday school, perform as church musician and is president of the Missionary Society.

She also helped found Mt. Calvary's after school program, which offers tutoring to children in all subject areas on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons.

Church and community service is a long standing family tradition dating back to Mrs. Johnson's great-grandparents, Aquilla and Laura Johnson, who settled in Towson and joined Mt. Calvary A.M.E. Church.

"A Johnson female has been at Mt. Calvary since the late 1800's," said her forty something daughter, Mrs. Ursula Slade. "Even though we've moved from Towson we still go there for church services."

Mrs. Slade, an employee with the federal government, spends at least 12 hours weekly at Mt. Calvary where she serves as a member of the steward board, the church's governing body.

Strong family ties and a devout spiritual background have carried over to her daughter, Mrs. Keionna Neal, 26, an only child and a 1988 graduate of Bowie State University. While away at college, she faithfully attended worship services.

"I just joined the junior missionaries and will be working with Young People's Day and as a team leader for Women's Day," said Mrs. Neal.

As a junior missionary at Mt. Calvary, Mrs. Neal is active in the church outreach programs and volunteers at two area shelters for the homeless and victims of domestic abuse.

Her husband Bobby and daughter Brittany, who represents the fourth generation of female worshipers at Mt.Calvary, are helping maintain the family tradition. Brittany is a member of the cradle roll and is officially listed as a member of the church congregation.

How close are these fiercely devoted women? "They talk to each other first thing in the morning and the last thing at night," said Doris' husband Walter Johnson, who describes his wife as "one of the best women in the world."

"The lord has truly blessed us" said Mrs. Johnson as she plays with her great-granddaughter Brittany, "he's truly blessed this family."

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